

Ark Volume 18

Act 1: Return of the King

“Phew.”

A heavy sigh flowed out. His expression sank even more as he looked at the residents gathered in the town hall. Galen the mayor of Lancel village, the Meow and Wolrang representatives as well as the thieves who were the representatives of the Samcheong College of Education were gathered. The group of people were why Shambala was sighing. An unidentified bandit group was scheming to loot Lancel! He grasped that the bandit group had 300 people and that the numbers would increase even more. After Galen heard the shocking information, he summoned the representatives of each species for a meeting. And the meetings to prepare a counterattack continuously repeated. Since they were unable to come up with an answer over the last two days, a tired sigh would naturally emerge.

“Why is this happening.....? The number of residents had increased and the village was finally becoming stable.....if we’re attacked then Lancel village will become like it was before..... Ah, why do these things always happen to Lancel village.....?”

Galen murmured with a pained expression. Then Shambala replied in impatient voice.

“Are you going to complain or resolve the problem? This is not the time for that. Like I said, this isn’t long left.”

“I know that. I understand.....”

Galen sighed again with his haggard complexion.

“It’s really frustrating! How can we solve this problem?”

Then someone struck the table and shouted. With a flowing, silver mane, the big figure was the elder of the Wolrang clan.

“What’s the point of this meeting in the first place? We know the enemy will strike. In addition, they’ve also killed many of our species! Then isn’t there only one answer? Fight! Fight them to the death!”

“That’s right!”

“There is no need to wait for those guys!”

“Instead, we should go out and show them an example!”

The Wolrang clan members showed off their fangs and growled. Until recently, the Wolrang had been slaves in the vampire territory. After travelling to Lancel from the vampire territory, their wild instincts had awakened while travelling the continent. Therefore the Wolrang had awakened their instincts as warriors. When the Wolrang expressed their savagery, the atmosphere instantly became serious.

“No, that is.....”

Galen stuttered with an unbearable expression.

“Bah, these dogs never change.”

The Meow elder Hassan who was sitting on the other side of the table snorted with her nose in the air. The eyes of the excited Wolrang simultaneously focused on Hassan.

“What you do mean by that you hairy balloon?”

“Didn’t you hear me? As expected from dogs, never listening to other people speak.”

“What? Dogs?”

“Haven’t you been listening? There are at least 300 of them. Furthermore, aren’t they all foreigners equipped with considerable skills? If we haphazardly attack without a plan than there is no telling what will happen.”

“Those cats.....do you want to try us?”

“Try you? It wouldn’t be bad.”

Hassan laughed and showed her claws. The Meow and Wolrang in the room growled at each other after being provoked. Then the raccoon clan representative cautiously said towards the two clan elders.

“My opinion is a little different. There is no way to stop the enemies with Lancel’s current power. Then shouldn’t all the residents take shelter and wait for those guys to pass? If they stay too long than the soldiers of Jackson will get involved and those guys will be forced to leave Lancel. If we protect the residents then we can reconstruct the town.”

“What?”

The two elders shouted simultaneously.

“Are you running away because you’re a little afraid? Do you expect the Wolrang to take such dishonourable actions?”

“Bah, what a typical idea from the raccoons who only dig tunnels! They’re no different from the dogs!”

Thus another shouted match began. Both the Wolrang elder and the raccoon representative hit the table with an unpleasant expression.

“Tunnel? What do you mean? Aren’t you the ones who created the overpasses? We’re the ones who struck the nails in most of the buildings in this village! Do you think we want to leave it?”

‘Damn, it’s starting again.’

Shambala shook his head with a disgusted expression. There were a number of reasons for the unsuccessful meetings but this was the biggest problem. Lancel village was split into four different types of inhabitants. The ex-thieves, the Meow, the Wolrang and the raccoons. And the species that had the most right to speak were the natural warriors the Meow and Wolrang clan. But these two were literally cat and dog and didn’t get along. Since their living areas were separated

and any big problems were arbitrated by Galen, this problem hadn't really occurred before. Now if the Wolrang gave any advice than Hassan would just laugh, while the Wolrang would ignore Hassan if she tried to speak. Even the raccoon clan would sometimes interject their feelings, so the fighting meant the meetings couldn't proceed properly.

'Besides, there is also an issue with the mayor.'

Shambala clicked his tongue and looked at Galen. Galen was no doubt a good mayor. That was obvious since he was able to manage the Meow, Wolrang, thieves, raccoons and the Baran clan in one village without any major problems. But unfortunately Galen had no ability as a field commander. No aside from his talent as a field commander, he couldn't even handle it when the beast clans started arguing like this. And Shambala also didn't have any talent as a field commander.

'It really is crazy. Isn't this a problem that occurs when different species are gathered together? But it will be impossible to defeat those guys just by listening to this.....'

Shambala surveyed the meeting room and sighed again. If it was a battle than Shambala had confidence in himself. But leading a meeting and commanding troops wasn't in Shambala's nature. That was the reason why he entrusted the autonomous group in Seutandal to JusticeMan. In addition, this wasn't Seutandal. It was impossible for Shambala to command the Lancel NPCs.

"There's no need to think about it. Let's find their hideout and beat them to death!"

"You stupid dogs! They have a support army!"

"As expected, we should take refuge and avoid trouble!"

"Mayor, what do you think?"

The eyes of the people quarrelling focused on Galen.

"I, I....."

Galen was stuttering when it occurred.

“Everything is rejected!”

The doors of the meeting room burst open and a rough voice could be heard. Every eye reflexively turned to focus on the door. Then they all started shouting.

“Ark!”

“Ark, you came. Thank you, thank you.”

Galen was moved to tears as he got up to greet his saviour. It wasn't just Galen. The ex-thieves and beast clan members also flocked towards Ark.

“Ark hyung-nim!”

“Ohhhh, it is Hero Maban's descendant!”

Ark panted as he ran out of breath and nodded.

“Pant pant pant, fortunately I'm not too late.”

“You're late enough you idiot.”

Shambala murmured in a curt voice.

“Have you just been wandering around since you were contacted?”

“Wandering around? Can you say that even after looking at my face? Ugh!”

Ark's face was pale white and it seemed like he was going to vomit.....It was the side effect of traversing the continent in just two days. Once again, Ark had been drinking alcohol in a tavern in Paradon when Roco had contacted him. And Paradon was a city in the northern area of Bristania. Lancel was the exact opposite and it was located in the south of Schudenberg. Even if the Letter Movement allowed ease of travel around cities, it wasn't omnipotent. There were restrictions in the distance that could be moved. In addition, the places where the Letter

Movement tower had been placed were limited. Therefore Ark had to continuously use the Letter Movement and Radun to travel between cities before finally reaching Giran. It was constant riding and travelling! Thus the ramen that Ark ate in the morning felt like it was going to come back up.

‘But there is no time for me to vomit!’

Ark swallowed down the noddles that felt like it was coming up his throat.

“.....Did you swallow? Are you coming over?”

Shambala slowly withdrew while giving him a dirty look. However Ark didn’t care and just slowly entered the hall. Ark had shown up like a comet when Lancel was in a crisis! Galen, the thieves and the beast clans all looked at Ark with expectation. After everything that Ark did in the past, none of them looked at him with doubt. Ark who had all the expectations on him was about to finally start the formal meeting.

“Uha!”

Suddenly there was a strange sound by the door. The residents reflexively turned their heads and flinched. It was a huge figure holding a greatsword! But it wasn’t because of his physical form that the residents flinched. The man surveyed the group of beasts and was brought to tears.

“Dogs, cats and raccoons are gathered to hold a meeting..... A holy land! This place is a holy land!”

“W-what, what’s with this human?”

The beast clans murmured at the appearance of the strange human.

“Kyaaaaak!”

Then there was a scream from behind the man and a woman popped out. And her hand lodged in between Hassan’s stomach fat.

“What, what the? An attack?”

Hassan burst out with confusion as she fell down.

“Heok! Heheok! What are you.....! S-stop! It tickles!”

“T-this is false! So fluffy, I’ve never seen such a cute creature! Yes, it is cotton! Cotton? It is impossible for a doll to be this cute! Zipper, there must be a zipper hidden somewhere!”

The woman rolled around the wriggling Hassan and shouted. The residents looked at the two people who suddenly appeared with foolish eyes. Shambala was staring with foolish eyes as well and he asked Ark.

“What the, these guys?”

“They came to help.....”

“Help?”

“It is a long explanation.”

Ark sighed and scratched his head. Yes, the pair who appeared with Ark was Bread and Redian. The reason that Bread and Redian came to Lancel was because of Ark’s plan. They had been drinking together when Ark had been contacted by Roco about Lancel village.

‘Wait? Wouldn’t Roco only contact me if the situation is really serious?’

Naturally having people with a lot of power would be good. And Bread and Redian were known as the strongest pair in Bristania! Dragging those two along would certainly help. Of course, even with the misunderstanding those two wouldn’t traverse the continent to help Ark. But didn’t those two have a weakness? Ark came up with a crazy idea.

“Damn, I’m sorry but I have to go.”

“What the? Why? Weren’t we just beginning to drink?”

"A slightly serious problem as occurred in a village I know."

"Village? A serious problem? What?"

"I don't know yet. Just that some guys are trying to attack the village."

"Attack the village? But why do you have to go to the village?"

"That village is a special place to me. Did you hear Baekgu's words? After I rescued the Wolrang clan, they immigrated to a new village. The place I guided them to is the village being attacked. If the village is attacked and the Wolrang family exterminated than it is my responsibility."

"The village where the Wolrang live?"

Bread suddenly ate the bait.

"The users are attacking the village where dogs live peacefully!"

Bread had a crazy dog mania! That's why he rescued Baekgu from the thieves. Thus Ark let him know that the village where the dogs were gathered was in danger. The next sentence was bait for Bread.

"Those guys would definitely abuse the animals."

"Damn.....! Where is it? Guide me there right away!"

As expected, Bread threw away his wine glass and jumped up.

"Wait a minute, you idiot!"

Then Redian spoke in an irritated voice.

"Where on earth are you planning to go? We already have some work to do. Now that we've settled things with Ark and the seal on the dungeon is released, shouldn't we go back to capture the dungeon?"

"But the dogs. The dogs! If I don't go than the dogs might die!"

"I don't care, I already followed your actions earlier but no more!"

Redian frowned and turned her head. Then Bread started sweating. But Ark also prepared some bait for Redian.

“It’s not just the Wolrang. The Meow will also be sacrificed.....”

“Meow?”

“The cat clan. There are also a lot of Meow living in Lancel village.”

While Bread loved dogs, she was weak to cats. After coming to Paradon, he learnt that Bread and Redian loved dogs and cats. It was to the extent that they fought verbally over it. Of course Redian’s ears pricked as soon as he brought cats into the conversation. Ark put on a fake pained expression and deliberately murmured.

“Ahh, it is so dreadful to think that the Wolrang and Meow might be killed.....”

Before he could even finish, Redian threw away the chicken leg she was eating and jumped up. Then she said to Ark and Bread.

“What are you doing? Isn’t it urgent?”

Thus Ark was able to attract Bristania’s strongest pair to help him. Well, it was good until they went nuts after seeing the Wolrang and Meow at the town hall. Thanks to Bread and Redian sticking to the Wolrang and Meow, the meeting couldn’t progress. Ark sighed and muttered.

“Hey, you guys should go explore the village.”

Ark made one of the Wolrang and Meow their guides and drove them out of the meeting.

“Hmm hmm, then let’s start meeting again.”

Ark said while coughing awkwardly. The residents stared blankly at the two people who disappeared before concentrating again.

“Those two people.....well, it’s lucky that you came. First, let me tell you the situation in the village.....”

"That's okay. I heard it while coming here."

Ark waved his hand and interrupted Galen's words. Then he deliberately glared at the residents and said.

"What on earth have you been doing?"

"What? The meeting for a counter of course....."

"Meeting?"

Ark shook his head with outrage.

"It has been six days (game time) since Shambala brought the information to me. The remaining time left isn't that long. Yet the only thing you have done is have meetings?"

"It's because of that damn cat! She has to comment every time I give an opinion....."

The Wolrang elder stood up and pointed to Hassan. Then Hassan grabbed her beard and also shouted.

"I wouldn't comment if you didn't keep on talking nonsense!"

"Nonsense? Aren't the raccoons the one talking nonsense?"

"No, why are we being dragged into this?"

The raccoon representative jumped up and once again the meeting room became a mess. When the elders got into an argument again, several beast clan members frowned. This situation had repeated for two days. Galen just sighed as he lost all his willpower to break them up.

"Stop!"

The shout was like a bomb had exploded. The cry emerged from Ark's mouth and swept like a storm through the meeting room. When the stormy voice swept past, the excited elders instantly shut up. The effects of advanced Intimidation combined with charisma had overwhelmed

the audience. In fact, normally he wouldn't use Intimidation on the residents of Lancel village. If he used Intimidation then he could lead the dialogue but if it failed then the intimacy would fall by 50%. Since it was his hometown, having his intimacy with the Lancel village decrease will be a significant loss. Yet he didn't have time to worry about the results of Intimidation.

'.....What I was concerned about has happened.'

In fact, it had weighed on his mind the whole time. Just before Seutandal rose, Lancel had been connected to Haman fortress using the dimensional gate. At the time, most of the residents had helped Ark but some of them were users as well. And some of them had posted about the experience on the bulletin board. Of course, the Hermes alliance would notice and realize the existence of Lancel village.

'Even if I only visit Lancel sometimes, it is possible to call it my hometown. I guessed that those guys would take some action.'

But he never imagined that they would attack the NPCs of the village like this. Of course, the Hermes alliance had targeted the NPCs in Seutandal. There was no reason for them not to aim at the NPCs in village.

But Seutandal was different from Lancel. If they occupied Seutandal with the Nakujuk then they would be recognized as the power there. However, Lancel was a part of the Schudenberg kingdom. Even if they plundered it, the village couldn't be occupied.

'Lancel doesn't have a lot compared to other villages the same size. If their reason was looting then they wouldn't bother to target Lancel. As expected, their target was him. There's no doubt about it since Shambala said that their main goals are my store and the Magic Tower.'

The main point was why it was occurring now. Presently the Hermes alliance had suffered significant losses thanks to the destruction of the lawless port. Of course, when thinking about it than those guys wouldn't leave it alone. But he had expected retaliation against Seutandal not Lancel. So Ark had often checked the situation in

Seutandal through JusticeMan. However they had unexpectedly aimed at Lancel.

‘Why are they attacking Lancel when the lawless port had just been destroyed.....?’

After such a large loss, what reason why they have to waste hundreds of guild members to attack Lancel? But Ark soon discovered the reason why.

‘The stolen goods brought from Seutandal!’

20% of the stolen goods from Seutandal had been brought to Ark’s store thanks to his tip. Of course, the Hermes alliance suffered a significant loss when the lawless port was destroyed but the confiscated goods were also a large part of their investment. The warehouse where the stolen goods were stored in the lawless port was leased to other pirates. In addition to leasing the warehouses, they were also responsible for disposing of the stolen good.

‘If they confiscate the stolen goods then it will become the property of the Hermes alliance! If they have the stolen goods then they can recover from the loss of the lawless port.’

That was Raiden’s thought. But in this situation, they couldn’t attack Seutandal to take back the stolen goods. Then they somehow received information that 10,000 gold worth of goods was being carried to Lancel?

‘That is enough reason to attack Lancel despite the various risks.’

And if they really succeeded in attacking Lancel.....

Not only would they steal the goods worth 10,000 gold, they would also plunder the stock kept for Ark’s store! But there was even more. Ark had a significant investment in the real estate of Lancel. He was 100% convinced that he would make a profit so he hadn’t regretted the investment. Whenever Ark received some profit from his store, he would invest it back into the village. Therefore he currently had a 4%

stake in the village. Ark's investment strategy of investing 200 gold for every 0.1% share had increased to 250 gold. It had grown 25% within a few months. In other words, Ark's current real estate worth was 10,000 gold!

'Of course, there is no way to govern Lancel even if I have a stake in the real estate. But if those guys attack they won't just take some goods. If the village suffers serious damage.....'

The real estate market would fall to the bottom! It would be an astronomical loss! Ark would suffer tremendous losses the moment Lancel was plundered. Ark's dream of a trade route through Ark's store, the real estate price jump, the lawless port commission etc. would be ruined. No, those thousands of gold could have a huge impact on people's lives. But such an important battle was being affected by the emotional quarrels of these people! There was no time to consider his degree of intimacy with the NPCs.

'I have to defend the village!'

"It is really pathetic!"

Ark glared at the beast clans and shouted roughly. Currently Ark was at a crossroads of whether he would live or die. That explosive sentiment caused Intimidation to have enormous strength. Like a bomb exploding in the meeting room, the beast clans shrunk and hung their tails between their legs with fear.

"Isn't this a meeting to determine a plan? Fighting among the Wolrang and Meow, as well as the raccoons' suggestion to flee is not helpful!"

Ark spoke using Intimidation and glared around the meeting room.

"B-but....."

"Of course, there is some truth in the raccoon's opinion."

Ark restrained Galen from voicing an objection. Shambala confirmed that it was Jewel's group in the cave. All the users belonged to the

Hermes alliance. There were 300 users between level 250~300!

As a village in the mountains, Lancel had quite a few combat troops. The ex-thieves, Wolrang and Meow were 300 people, and when added with the raccoon were 500 people. However, the former thieves were people who switched jobs after graduating from the Samcheong College of Education. In fact, there were only 100 members of the guard that could be utilized in actual battle. Despite being level 200, the thieves only had an actual combat ability of around level 150 since that was when they switched jobs. Although they had some special abilities, the Meow and raccoons were the same. Only the Wolrang were level 300.

‘In the end, the numbers that could be considered battle worthy are around 300 people. When comparing Jewel’s group and Lancel, the combat power is almost equal!’

The problem was that Duke would soon join the party.

‘Those guys have already collected information about Lancel village and worked out a strategy. And since they withdrew from the guild, the Hermes alliance won’t be risked by the mission. It was natural for them to invest everything into winning. Thus the support forces wouldn’t be dozens but hundreds of people. In the end, those guys would have about 500~600 people!’

Even if their numbers were less, their levels were higher which would even it up. However, they also had more people. If they attacked then there was a 100 in 100 chance of Lancel village losing. That’s why there was some merit to the raccoon’s plan of escaping. If they didn’t have a chance then they should escape the crisis and seek assistance from Lord Jackson. As a species full of artisans, it was natural for them to give that opinion. In fact, after Shambala brought the information Galen had sent a message to Jackson stating that Lancel would be attacked. But Lancel was a free village so it was difficult to send soldiers to help just for a possibility. Of course, Ark had 120% with Lord Jackson so he could convince the Lord to move but there was already no time. Anyway, if there was a surprise attack then Jackson would have no choice but to move. Once the soldiers moved then Jewel’s group would have no

choice but to leave Lancel. Ark summarized the raccoon's idea and Galen sighed before nodding.

"That does seem to be the only way to protect Lancel."

".....Do you really think it is possible to protect Lancel like that?"

Ark declared sharply.

"Lord Jackson can't protect Lancel village forever. One day the soldiers would have to return to Jackson. But those guys who have plundered the village will never give up on Lancel. They will keep on vigilantly watch Lancel in order to wait for a chance. Isn't it likely that they would return to the village?"

In other words, if the village was captured by those guys once then it would be the end. Now there was only one day remaining. There was no chance to move the goods from Ark's store to another place. Even if he could protect his store's assets, there was nothing he could do about the real estate. If the village was occupied then 10,000 gold worth of real estate would be taken away. Yes, Ark had no choice in the first place.

"The only thing we can do is unite and fight against those guys!"

".....!"

The meeting room was as quiet as a mouse after Ark's words. It wasn't because of the contents of the speech. It was the dreadful force emitted from Ark's eyes. It was natural. Thousands of gold hung on the battle! No, it was a battle where lives were at stake!

".....Do we have a chance?"

Galen swallowed his saliva and asked Ark. The ex-thieves and beast clans also looked at Ark tensely. Ark knew what they wanted him to say. He closed his eyes and allowed the residents' tension to rise before smiling and answering in a firm voice.

"Of course!"

“That’s it! The answer we waited for!”

The Wolrang elder suddenly slammed his fist on the table and shouted. Hassan also burst out laughing.

“Hohoho. As expected from Hero Maban’s descendant!”

“If Ark-nim says so than we can’t object!”

“We will follow Hyung-nim!”

The raccoons and ex-thieves also spoke firmly. Yes, there was a reason they had been arguing during the meetings for the last two days. It was because there was no one to say in a voice of conviction ‘we have to do this.’ But Ark who they had a 120% degree of intimacy with had shown up and said ‘it is possible to fight and win.’ When he spoke, the opinions of the Lancel residents instantly changed to his view. Galen also looked relieved that Ark had taken the burden off his hands.

“You are indeed the only person I can believe in. Then I’ll leave the commanding to you. Please protect Lancel village.”

There was a ringing sound and the quest information window popped up.

-Find New Settlers!

+ Sub Quest: War to Defend Lancel Village.

Thanks to your efforts, Lancel village has been developing. But some outlaws have obtained information about Lancel village and decided to attack it. If Lancel village is occupied by the outlaws then it will be difficult to predict the damage. The residents of the village will lose their homes and the reputation will fall so few people will visit the village. The only way to avoid this is to stop the outlaws.

The interim mayor Galen has entrusted the rights of the defensive war to you and you have the ability to command the residents. Minimize the damage on behalf of Galen and stop this situation (If you fail this quest

then the <Find New Settlers> quest will also be failed).

<Difficulty: ???>

<Additional Fact: If more than 30% of the village is destroyed and 30% of the residents are killed then the quest will fail>

'Damn!'

Ark frowned as he read the information window. In fact, his <Find New Settlers> had been finished when the Wolrang arrived in Lancel village. The quest had ended after 1 year and a half. However he hadn't felt it was necessary to receive the compensation straight away so he had delayed and went to Bristania. But now the quest which took 1 and a half years to complete might fail if he couldn't protect Lancel.....

'Although it is natural.'

What good would new settlers be if Lancel village was destroyed? Anyway, even without the quest Ark would be screwed if Lancel was occupied.

'Okay, it just has to turn out well. If hit by a bullet I'll die and I'll also die if hit by a missile. There is no room for me to withdraw.'

"Don't worry. I will do everything possible to defend Lancel village!"

Ark grabbed Galen's hand and answered. Ark had returned. The true leader of Lancel village had been handed the baton!

Act 2: Crime File

"I understand. We'll do it and immediately report."

The guards of Lancel village saluted and ran away. As the commander of the war, Ark had organized the troops for different tasks. Once again, NPCs also had levels like users. The Wolrang were level 300 and their

abilities were roughly equal to a user with the equivalent level. But those rough estimates were difficult in this situation. Several of the ex-thieves and beast clans had raised their level and learn skills as well. It was important to know oneself as well as one's opponent. If Ark didn't have a proper grasp of the military power than he would be unable to map out a proper strategy. So the first thing he had to do was determine the accurate information of his allies. Of course, the NPCs had no concept of things like level but an approximate guess could determine their position.

'After I grasp the number of allies and their abilities, I can build a detailed strategy.....'

The next place Ark visited was the raccoons.

"Ark-nim, I heard that you came."

The raccoons welcomed him as he entered their place.

"Will I be able to use the things I requested last time?"

Ark asked with a sense of expectation. Just like the Hermes alliance had always been thinking of Ark, Ark had always been thinking of the Hermes alliance. Ever since the Hermes alliance occupied Silvana, he was sure that he would one day conflict with them. So Ark had visited the raccoons and requested a secret project from them. He thought it was still too early to use but he had no choice in this situation. If 'it' would help in battle then he would use it. But the raccoon in charge of it shook his head.

"It's at the finishing stages but some time is still needed for completion."

".....That's right. It's fine if it's not possible but please hurry as much as you can."

"We've mobilized all our staff and have been staying up all night."

"Then I have another request for you."

“Please say it.”

“How many members of the raccoon clan can you rally immediately?”

“All the works except for the ones Ark-nim requested have been currently suspended. If necessary then we can rally everybody.”

“Then please work according to my directions from now on.”

Ark spread out a map and explained it to raccoon in charge. As expected, the emphasis was on the defense of the main buildings. Through the information obtained, Jewel’s main goals was not slaughtering the residents but the magic tower, Ark’s store and looting the village. There were hundreds of people so once the confusion fight started than he wouldn’t be able to 100% stop them. So Ark’s top priority were some countermeasures.

“Please create a barrier using steel plated wood around the main buildings. How long would that take?”

“It is a good idea. If we assemble it onsite than 2~3 hours should be enough to create a barrier around one building. The design won’t take that long so it will be mostly assembly time.”

“Then get started straight away. Their goals are Ark’s shop and warehouse, the magic tower and the town hall so those should be your top priority. Come find me when you are done. If possible, you should also build a barrier around the village.”

Ark explained while pointing at the map. Of course there was no meaning in building the barriers if the village fell. But by placing the barriers around the main buildings in advance, some degree of defense was possible through guerrilla attacks. However the money used for the war preparations was provided from the village’s public funds. Galen had appointed Ark as the special commander of the village so he had the authority to use the public funds. Naturally even the commander couldn’t embezzle the funds so he had to provide receipts to Lancel village. Ark had finished settling the payment when Ark remembered and asked.

“Ah, can you also check how this can be used?”

“Huh? This is.....?”

-Fire Draconian Skull (Rare, Material)

<It is impossible to confirm the information on Fire Draconian skull>

Ark had taken out the skull left by Lumines. He couldn't check the information or price of the Fire Draconian skull in the auction room at Paradon. But if it was the raccoons then they might be able to figure out its purpose. The raccoons had made accessories using unidentified special ingredients in the Underground World. The raccoon chief looked at it a while and showed some interest.

“This is a very unusual material. It is the first time I have seen something like this. But I have a sense of how to handle it. I know there are other tasks needed but can you leave this with me?”

If the NPC showed this response then it meant he could use it somehow.

“Will it take a lot of time to work with it?”

“If you leave it with me then I should finish it sometime this evening.”

“Then I'll leave it to you.”

Ark considered for a while and nodded. Since the information and price was unknown, it would be difficult to sell. But if the raccoon chief created something from it then it was possible to sell that item. Even though the processing cost was 200 gold, he wanted to see the results. The more expensive the processing cost was, the higher probability there was that the finished item would be good. So Ark entrusted the Fire Draconian skull to the raccoon chief. Once the raccoons built the barriers, the defense of the main buildings should increase quite a bit. But if the worst case situation appeared and the village was occupied then it would be for nothing. In the present state, the chances of the worst case situation happening was very high.

‘Now, the remaining problem is.....’

The next place Ark went to was his store. Although he had mobilized the residents, the main axis of the battle was Ark, Shambala and the helpers he recruited Bread and Redian. Despite the disadvantageous battle, Ark had some hope because of them. The users who belongs in the top 1% of New World! They were an unexpected power that Jewel couldn’t expect.

‘I have to organize the Lancel troops around them.’

After Ark finished his business, he decided to join them at Ark’s store to discuss the measures.

Ttukttuk, ttukttuk, ttukttuk!

When he approached the shop, the booming sound of hammers could be heard.

“What are you doing?”

“Ah, Oppa!”

Roco then came running out of the store. Then she explained with a pleasant smile.

“We’ve been preparing too. I couldn’t hear such talk and continue to stay still.”

The moment Shambala had mentioned a war, Roco had closed the store door and boarded up the windows and doors with thick wooden planks.

“This is slightly better.”

“.....It is better than nothing.”

“Don’t worry Oppa. I’ll protect the store somehow!”

“Yes, no matter what happens we’ll protect it with Manager-nim!”

Ulmeok and Sapjil cried out while holding a pot and a golf club. They were also equipped for combat in their own way. He honestly didn't think it would be very helpful but it was 100 times better than them running away. Roco had educated her staff properly. No, maybe their loyalty increased when Buksil started to also earn money from the business.

"Okay, you should hide the expensive items deep inside the warehouse as well as layer them inside your bags. Those guys attacking the village have probably brought chaotic scrolls but it is better than leaving them in the warehouse."

"I understand, Chairman-nim!"

Sapjil and Ulmeok ran towards the warehouse.

"By the way, did Shambala and a couple come here looking for me?"

"Huh? There hasn't been anyone looking for Oppa."

"How far did those guys wander?"

Ark spoke in an irritated expression so Roco smiled.

"They seem to be a little late. Have a cup of tea with me in the meantime."

"No, that....."

Ark restlessly surveyed the area before coughing and approaching Roco. After hesitating with an awkward expression, he searched through his bag. It was the Poco Poco doll he bought Roco from Paradon. But his hands shook nervously when he tried to grab the doll. His tongue had also become stiff.

"This is.....just....."

It wasn't unreasonable for Ark to hesitate. Since the only women Ark had really interacted with were Roco and Lariette, this was the first time he had deliberately given a female a gift. In addition, the Poco Poco doll

wasn't a simple gift. The Poco Poco doll had a built in device to record voices.....after much wavering, he decided to personally record a message but now he hesitated once he actually had to give it.

"It's nothing. Once the battle spreads then I will have to supervise the whole village. The situation is urgent so you should take as much care as possible."

Ark eventually spoke ambiguously after a while and scratched his head. Yes, he used this situation as an excuse for giving gifts. But Roco couldn't understand his inner thoughts and just shook her head.

"Don't worry. This store is Oppa's and my.....hum hum, no, this place is also important to me. And do you remember what I told you before? Recently I've been training in different melodies with the ghost. While he seemed to teach ridiculous skills at first, I learnt some good things. If those guys try to attack this store then I'll give them some trouble."

"Huh? What does that mean?"

"I'll use the melody skill I just learned to punish them."

Roco elatedly explained the skill she learnt not long ago. Ark who listened to the explanation was suddenly surprised and asked.

"Eek? Is there really that skill?"

"Yes, I've tried it once and it worked out quite well?"

"W-wait! Then can that skill affect the whole village?"

"To be exact, it is different from giving an effect to the village. Because it is music. Thanks to the maximum output range, it is able to be applied to quite a large area. But it isn't a buff or an attack magic....."

Ark eyes shone brightly at Roco's words.

'This is a huge weapon that I never even imagined!'

Roco didn't think the skill was that big a deal. She thought it was just a good skill for playing fun tricks. But despite not being an attack magic, the skill could exert an enormous effect. Ark instantly started planning strategies to take full advantage of Roco's skill. When almost all of the strategy was prepared, Shambala, Bread and Redian finally arrived.

"Have you finished visiting the entire village?"

"Ah, we saw it. It's so lively that I want to defend it even more."

"I agree."

Bread and Redian replied absent-mindedly. The sight of cats and dogs living so peacefully in the village was an enjoyable sight to them. Then Bread belatedly noticed Roco and asked Ark.

"Oh is this the first time you've met? This is....."

When Ark tried to introduce them, Bread went forward and stopped him.

"Wait a minute. Hmmm, hmmm, I got it. You're Ark's girlfriend!"

"W-what are you saying?"

"Eh? You're not? But you guys give off a positive energy? Huhuhu, you're still young. There's no need to worry. Although Redian and I are already like that. We have a sticky relationship.....ouch!"

Bread had been smirking impudently when he suddenly shrieked and fell down. After kicking Bread, Redian sighed and muttered.

"I'm really sorry about him. I'm Redian and that stupid person is Bread."

"It's okay."

Roco grinned and replied. Redian looked at Roco before smiling and nodding.

"Though that fool sometimes gets it right as well."

“Huh?”

“Nothing.”

Redian smiled subtly and shook her head. After the group exchanged greetings, they moved the meeting to the second floor of the shop. Ark provided Bread and Redian an overview of the situation in Lancel village. Bread murmured with a serious expression at the end of his explanation.

“When I heard this I guessed that Raiden was involved....he finally took such a bold move? That fellow might be shabby but he is as persistent as a snake. He absolutely won’t start a war until he is sure about it. He would have perfectly investigated Lancel’s present state beforehand. He would only take action when he judged that the odds were 100% in his favour. But you don’t have to worry. Because you have me.”

Bread laughed and praised himself. Redian just sighed and shook her head back and forth.

“I don’t know where that confidence comes from.....”

“No, Bread and Redian will definitely play a considerable role in the upcoming war. Unlike Shambala, Raiden won’t be expecting you two. Your power will be able to change the tides of the war.”

“We appreciate the compliment but we’re also users. There is a limit to how much we can against all those people.”

“That’s okay. It doesn’t matter whether it is 100 or 1000 people.”

“You should be quiet!”

Redian said to Bread in an irritated voice. Ark looked at the two of them before talking again.

“Of course, I also don’t think you two can go against so many people. But we also have something in our favour. Those guys still

haven't realized that we know about their plan to attack. When they arrive at Lancel village then we'll be able to cut down a considerable amount of their power without fighting."

"Decrease their power without fighting? How?"

Ark laughed at Shambala's question and looked at Roco. Then he explained the strategy he just devised using Roco's Minstrel skill. Shambala, Bread and Redian simultaneously looked at Roco after hearing the plan.

"Oh, a Minstrel? That's an unusual profession? No, did a Minstrel originally have this type of skill?"

"New World is indeed wide. Even though I've seen considerable amounts of skill and experienced many things, I've never heard of such a skill. It will indeed be able to inflict a large blow on those guys. But we can't expect a decisive effect with just that. Even if those guys suffer a blow, it still won't make up for the power difference."

Redian started organizing her thoughts.

"As expected, the biggest problem is the difference in troops. The most number of troops you can gather from Lancel are 300 people. On the other hand, they currently have 300 people as well. If the support army arrives then the difference will be huge. With fewer troops it won't be possible to fight as well as defend the village."

Redian was a magician and she grasped the situation instantly. Of course Ark knew that the biggest problem was the lack of troops. In a war, the most important thing wasn't level but numbers. In addition, Ark didn't just have to protect the village. Unlike Jewel's group, the Lancel troops consisted of 90% NPCs. He had to minimize their losses in the fight. But in this situation it was impossible to minimize the sacrifices of the NPCs. Let alone be able to keep the village!

"There is a method."

At that time Ark spoke with a smile. After obtaining the information for Lancel village, Galen hadn't been doing nothing. He instantly concealed the information that the village was being attacked. If rumours of a battle spread than the users would run away from the village. Since the secret was concealed, users were still crowding Lancel. They numbered around 300~400 people! Yes, Ark's secret intention was to drag the users into the battle. Of course, 70% of the users gathered in Lancel were level 100-150. When compared to the level 250 average of Jewel's group, it was at least a 100 level difference. It would be hard even if a couple of people attacked one person. However, 300~400 users were enough to be a threat. Moreover, Ark didn't care if users died. So Ark was going to employ the users as a shield for Lancel.

'Even if they don't play an active role in the battle, the good points of low-level users are that they are cheap to employ. Even if level 100~150 users entered the ware for 10~15 gold, it is possible for them to help. Even if only 70% of them were employed because of the merchants, that is still 200~300 people. If I add the troops of Lance village then it is worth a try!'

That was the countermeasure Ark thought of when flying to Lancel from Paradon. Of course, hiring 200~300 users would still cost 3,000~4,000 gold. However Ark had permission to use the public funds of Lancel village so cost wasn't a problem. After receiving the mission, Galen had delegated full power to him. It was possible to grant users rewards based on their contribution like JusticeMan did when cleaning up the lawless port. When Ark presented his idea Redian instantly nodded.

"Yes, if we use the plan you mentioned before and hire 300 people then we can overcome the difference in numbers. No, now there is no other way."

"Okay, then I'll start collecting the troops."

Ark finished the meeting and exited the store. Then he walked to the plaza where a lot of users were gathered.

"See, doesn't it fit? Ark's Store has closed its door."

“Hrm, then it must be true. The atmosphere of the village also seems strange lately.”

“There’s no time to be doing this. Did you see the video? They’re ruthless and don’t care about other users. We should go before sparks fly for no reason.”

“Sheesh, I quite liked this village.”

The buzzing noise of many upset users could be heard.

‘Video? What does that mean?’

Ark rushed to a user and asked.

“Wait a moment. What do you mean? What about a video?”

“Eh? Haven’t you seen it yet? It is.....”

The blood drained from Ark’s face as he listened to the user’s speech.

—

“T-this.....!”

Hyun-woo looked at the monitor with a devastated expression. From the monitor a combat scene in New World was taking place. Several hundred videos of battles occurred in New World each day, but the video Hyun-woo was watching now wasn’t an ordinary video. After being posted for only 1~2 hours, it had already reached 7000 views and drew serious attention from users! The reason was because the video didn’t show normal gameplay but that of a crime scene.

“Aaaaack!”

At that time, someone in the video started bleeding and collapsed. It was a user not a NPC. Yes, the ‘crime file’ showed the Haruna camping ground which was a small village in the southern mountains of Schudenberg where users were being attacked. It was a video of users

attacking an NPC village, something previously considered taboo in New World. The users invaded the village and murdered NPCs. Their faces were covered in masks but Ark instantly knew their identity. No, to be exact he knew the user leading them. The archer moved his hands at a tremendous speed and shot arrows which scattered like an evening shower!

‘Duke.....!’

That archer was indeed Duke. The players Duke was leading were the support army for Jewel’s group. But why was Duke invading a small village like Haruna a day before the invasion of Lancel? The reason was obvious in the next scene. The small village only had 10 NPCs but it sold supplies and gave simple quests to complete in the area. It wasn’t much but there were 20~30 people resting in the village to inspect their equipment. After Duke raided Haruna, most users managed to escape. However, some users with a strong sense of justice stayed behind to help the NPCs. But the NPCs died from the overwhelming power and the users were surrounded by Duke’s party.

“These bastards, are they insane attacking an NPC village? What’s the idea?”

The users had been driven to a critical condition. Then the masked Duke snorted and replied.

“Heh, you’re the stupid ones. You should’ve escaped with the others but your strong sense of justice made you stay behind to help the NPCs. Are you thinking that you won’t lose a lot of experience if you die since you’re low level? But I’m not that good natured.”

When Duke raised his hand, his party members simultaneously took out a scroll.

“Huk, t-that is.....!”

The users’ faces paled when they saw the scroll. The scrolls Duke’s group were holding were the [Peel], [Robbery], [Seize], [Unfortunate] etc.....it was a set of chaotic scrolls.

"I'll make you shed tears of blood and regret this!"

Duke clenched his fist firmly and the party simultaneously activated their scrolls. At the same time red light emerged and the effect of many scrolls piled up on the users' body. If he was killed like that than half of his equipment would fall! The users were panic stricken and tried to run. But Duke just laughed and killed the users one by one.

"Aaaaack!"

Then the users' items fell thanks to the effect of the scroll.

"We won't forgive anyone who opposes us."

Thus Duke killed all the users and collected their loot. Then another member of the party muttered.

"Now, shall we go to the place called Lancel?"

'That Duke bastard.....!'

Ark glared as Duke's part disappeared.

-This is a video I risked my life to hide and shoot. New World is so frightening these days that users would even attack NPC villages. At the end they said they are visiting a place called Lancel..... If anybody is in the area then it would be good to leave early.

That was the comment attached to the video by 'Information Source 24 hours' who posted it. However Hyun-woo didn't believe the comment. The user who took this video wasn't 'Information Source 24 hours.' No, he would've never been able to hide and take the video. The battle scene and voices was too clear for the user to be hiding.

'Perhaps....no, it is definitely Duke who took the video and gave it to someone to post on the bulletin board!'

The reason Duke took the video was simple. Jewel and Duke thought that the users would be a variable while they attacked Lancel village. Because they were low-level, they didn't really have to worry about the

death penalty. Duke made the video and distributed it in order to account for the users. They would feel fear after seeing the scene of the user being murdered and having their equipment stolen. Normally users who participated in fights like this had a low chance of dropping equipment. If hired by NPCs to participate in a village defense war then there was no need to worry about being chaotic. That's why Hyun-woo came up with the idea of hiring users. But the situation had changed with the video of users' equipment being plundered. When thinking about it with common sense, that wasn't possible in a battlefield with hundreds of users but the effect of the video was sufficient. There were no users who would participate in a battle where they could lose equipment for 10~15 gold. And the effects of the video were already appearing in Lancel. Duke's goal was to scare users away from the village by proclaiming that Lancel was their next target. The users wouldn't accept Ark's invitation to become hired mercenaries anymore. It was indeed a clever trick to use the video!

'.....Jewel and Duke are starting to use their heads.'

It was different from the time where they just believed in their level and blindly rushed in. However, in this situation he couldn't applaud them.

'7,000 people have already seen this video. There is still one day before they will attack Lancel so the people who watch the video will be able to get in touch with their friends. The plan to hire mercenaries for Lancel village was impossible! In addition, approximately 200 people had appeared in the video with Duke. When added to Jewel's group, it is 500 people. There is no way we can defeat such a number without the help of mercenaries!'

In this situation, the only way to hire users was to pay them enough to cover the cost of lost equipment. Even if they didn't have that many equipment since they were still low levelled, it would still be at least 200 gold. Hiring a level 100~150 user for 200 gold? It was a ridiculous price. Even if they managed to defeat Jewel's group, the cost of hiring the 300 mercenaries was so much that Lancel would still perish.

'Is this the end? Is there really no other way?'

Hyun-woo felt complete despair. The video had perfectly blocked one of Ark's plans. It was a game strategy that would be impossible to use in reality. Then a random business card thrown near the monitor caught his eye. Hyun-woo who had been without ideas felt a sudden flash as he looked at the business card.

'This business card.....wait, maybe.....yes, I can use this method! But will it be in time? No, fortunately there is still one day before those guys will attack. That should be enough time! I just have to persuade this person and drag them to my side!'

The storm of sparks finally settled inside Hyun-woo's head. Hyun-woo had a breakthrough and instantly ran towards the telephone. And he called the number on the business card. With a small smile of satisfaction on his face, Hyun-woo talked on the phone for a while. Hyun-woo's proposal worked. Now the only thing left was time!

"The battle will begin tomorrow. Can you come before that?"

"Giran contains some of my personnel. If they ride horses then they can arrive within 3~4 hours."

'That's it! That Duke bastard, you dared play a trick with the video? Then I'll crush your hard work in the same way!'

Ark disconnected the phone with flames burning in his eyes. A breakthrough was found in a place he couldn't possibly consider. It was 19 hours until the Lancel defensive war would begin!

—

"Ark....."

Jewel spat out in a bitter voice. Over the past few months, every day had been dismal for Jewel. It was because of the failure of the Seutandal conquest war. The Seutandal conquest war was like a chance passing through the sky above Jewel. If Seutandal had become a colony of the Hermes alliance as planned then the profits obtained would be

terrific. And gold in New World was cash in reality. Just like any gamer, Jewel's dream was to become a tycoon from the game. But that dream had been destroyed right underneath his eyes. All because of Ark! Jewel still clearly remembered the failure of the Seutandal conquest war. He wasn't able to forget. How could he forget a winning lottery ticket being torn right in front of him? Since then Jewel's only goal had been to destroy Ark.

'And I've finally made it.'

Jewel looked at the users gathered in the cave. It was a secret society of the Hermes alliance formed to destroy Ark's home base of Lancel village. When Duke's support army was added, there were 500 of them! Only 100 people had been required to destroy the village in the mountain.

'I should have done this earlier.'

In fact, he had found out a long time ago that Lancel was Ark's home base. During the Seutandal conquest war, unidentified NPCs had appeared through the dimensional gate from Lancel. The NPCs of that village ruined the plan to conquer Seutandal! Besides, there was a store in the village called Ark's Store. Jewel's pent-up anger burst after he confirmed that fact. The siege of Silvana and the Seutandal conquest plan, Ark kept on shooting pepper spray at the Hermes alliance. As a result, the Hermes alliance received thousands of gold worth of damage. And those losses had gone into Ark's pocket. That's right, Ark's store was created with their money. Jewel had determined to go to Lancel village straight away after confirming that fact. However, Jewel's request had been rejected by Raiden.

"Of course I want Ark to pay for it. But the priority is to concentrate on using the lawless port to recapture Seutandal. Moreover, Ark is closely linked to Seutandal. It might become complicated if we touch Lancel village in vain."

That had been Raiden's reply. It was one of the reason they didn't touch Lancel despite knowing of its existence. However, the lawless port

created by the Hermes alliance had been destroyed by Seutandal's navy. Thanks to that, the Hermes alliance was quickly buried in a huge pile of debt. They invested money in the lawless port and its facilities since they would receive the profits back if it operated normally.

"It fell, we're ruined!"

Raiden completely fell into a state of panic. But Jewel thought the destruction of the lawless port was a chance.

"I have a way to solve this."

"A way to solve it?"

"There is no way to recoup the loss using normal methods. But we have a lot of troops. Then can't we use the troops to make money?"

The method proposed by Jewel was to create a secret society offshoot of the alliance. If those users raided villages and plundered the loot then it could recoup the loss!

"But the probability of normal NPCs dropping items when killed....."

That is why I suggest plundering the town. Didn't we previously occupy the valley village in Seutandal? We didn't get items from the NPCs but we confirmed that we could steal items from the stores. That was only a small village in Seutandal so we should get considerably more profit from villages in the continent."

"If you do such a thing and a problem occurs....."

"The members of the secret society will withdraw from the guild beforehand so there won't be a problem."

"Would members of the alliance want to join the secret society?"

Invading a NPC village was a level of crime different from PK. While users would become chaotic if they PKed, they would truly become a bandit group if they looted a village. Raiding a village was classified as a special crime so they would gain an absurd number of chaotic points.

While Jewel would receive some experience as the leader of an attack group, the members of the bandit group with such high chaotic values wouldn't be able to play the game normally. If they died at the hands of a guard then they would be rotting in jail for at least half a year. But such penalties already didn't matter to Jewel. As long as Lancel village was destroyed and Ark was dropped into the hell of despair then Jewel was prepared to accept any penalty.

"I am already prepared. And if sufficient compensation is promised then other users will apply. Once the proceeds of the loot are distributed and the alliance recovers from its losses, the alliance will help the secret society members level up and give them equipment."

It was similar to a gangster in a crime organization who willingly went to jail for sufficient compensation. If the alliance recovered its losses than that wouldn't be a problem. As long as they weren't stuck in jail, the chaotic value would even decrease when completing quests.

"The method's not bad."

Raiden said with an enthusiastic expression. Whether it be reality or the game, money always played a huge role. The plan of creating the lawless port to handle stolen goods and earn money had failed and now they had a massive pile of debt. In the end, Raiden accepted Jewel's request and the secret society filled with 500 members was created. Yes, the origin of the secret society was to save the Hermes alliance from the huge pile of debt. However, Jewel had established the society with one goal in mind and he borrowed its strength to attack Lancel. It was a plan to stab Ark to death. Of course, the secret society's first target was Lancel. Raiden also agreed with Jewel's plan in that regard.

'Ark, now it is your turn. I'll smash everything of yours to pieces. But this is only the beginning. As long as the secret society exists you can never run away. I will kill your fellow colleagues and any NPCs who give you quests. You will realize your big mistake in making an enemy of the Hermes alliance. Hahaha!'

"Hahaha!"

Eyes suddenly concentrated on Jewel after he burst out laughing. The laugh had escaped his head to emerge from his mouth. Jewel coughed and pretended ignorance.

“Hum hum, is everyone assembled?”

“Yes, all 528 members have connected.”

Jewel nodded at the report and stood up. He took a deep breath before speaking quickly.

“I don’t need to say it again, but our goal is the resurgence of the Hermes alliance. However that will not be possible without a big achievement first. Ark and the people who follow him are the cause of our crisis. If we don’t destroy him then there will be no future for the Hermes alliance. Is there anyone with any doubts?”

“No!”

“For the glory of the Hermes alliance!”

They hadn’t connected to New World in three days while waiting for this chance. All the members lifted their weapons in the air and shouted out their frustration.

“Okay, let’s go!”

Jewel led the 500 players and advanced towards Lancel village.

Act 3: Prelude: Illusion Sonata

“The heavens are helping us.”

Jewel murmured as he looked up at the night sky. Since the early evening, dark clouds started to spread across the night sky so the lights from the stars couldn’t be seen anymore. The forest was therefore so dark it was impossible to distinguish anything moving within it. While

it wasn't okay for moving through the forest, it was perfect for a night attack. He felt good for some reason.

"Is that Lancel village?"

While crossing the forest, it was possible to see a faint light through the bushes. It seemed to be light coming from open doors and through windows in Lancel village. A low laugh emerged from Jewel's mouth as his goal came within sight.

"Huhuhu, that village sounds as quiet as a mouse. 1~2 hours should be sufficient."

"Wait, why is it so quiet?"

Duke who had been observing the village narrowed his eyes and muttered.

"Didn't you film the video so that users would know we are attacking Lancel?"

"Yes, so there village is quiet because there are no users as planned."

Jewel thought it was because of the video that no users were in the village. But Duke still looked unsure.

"No, even if the users ran away the NPCs shouldn't be this quiet."

"That's because the NPCs wouldn't know. Think about it. There is no reason for the users leaving the village to give a reason to NPCs. The NPCs also can't search the internet to watch the video. So there is no possibility of the NPCs taking countermeasures from rumours flying between users."

"I guess, but....."

Jewel just laughed without any worries and spoke.

"There won't be a problem even if the NPCs sensed something. The video was only posted last night. It would be impossible to gain

reinforcements during that time. Besides, look at their stupid expressions. Is that the expression of someone facing a crisis?"

Jewel pointed to the residents of Lancel wandering around the suburbs. He could find no awareness of danger in any of the residents.

"It is good to be careful but you don't have to worry. The opponents are NPCs."

Jewel spoke lightly as he surveyed the village.

"Duke, lead units 4,5, and 6 to the left. I'll lead units 1 and 2 to the other side. Once the town is surrounded then we'll attack.

A cruel light appeared in Jewel's eyes.

"Once the battle starts then don't spare a single one of them in the village. Then the suicide squads will move to Ark's shop and the magic tower and will loot it before blowing them up. It is a low-level village but it is in the midst of growing so the profits should be quite good."

The troops split up and moved according to the plan. Their goal for surrounding the village was to not allow any Lancel residents to escape. The members crept through the bushes after dispersing and moved to their target point.

'Huhuhu, that Ark, I want to see what kind of expression you have when you come here.'

The smile never left Jewel's face even while crawling through the bushes. After approximately 1 hour, Jewel's group had finished surrounding the village. After taking a short break, he heard Duke's whisper from the other side.

-Jewel, we're ready.

A beast like smile flashed on Jewel's mouth.

"Now, everyone attack! Wall of Flames, Fire Wall!"

Jewel stood up and waved his hand, causing dozens of flame pillars to engulf the village. The residents ran away from the flames into a barrier created beforehand. After Jewel's pre-emptive strike, the stone wall was soon destroyed and they invaded the village. Duke also poured arrows from the opposite side and led his troops into the village.

"Let's finish this in one breath! Everybody charge!"

"Wah ah ah ah!"

When the 500 members charged the village, it was instantly turned to fire and dust. However, it didn't take a long time before Jewel realized something was strange.

"What, what the? What on earth.....?"

Jewel stopped attacking and scratched his head with confusion. Jewel had been firing magic blindly at the village. Not only Jewel, but the 500 members had shot various arrows and magic at the village. The constant explosion and dirt meant that it was difficult to see. But the residents showed no reaction to the attack. They acted like they couldn't see the people attacking the village and there wasn't any damage on their clothes. Even the swords just went straight through the bodies of the residents.

"Leader-nim, over there!"

Then one of the members shouted and pointed to the town square. Jewel reflexively turned his head and looked at the sight with amazement. Dozens of residents were running around the square. But that wasn't what caught Jewel's attention. The person he saw in the village centre wearing leather armour was.....

".....Ark!"

Yes, the person was Jewel's enemy Ark. Jewel stiffened after finding Ark. His biggest reason to attack Lancel was to get revenge on Ark. But he never imagined that Ark would be here now. After a while, Jewel started using magic despite his confusion.

“Rise flames of a burning inferno! Take this, Hellfire!”

Huge flames signed the area from the explosion. Ark was swallowed up by the flames. No, Jewel thought the flames hit but it just went through Ark. Ark stared through the flames at Jewel and chuckled. Then Ark slowly lifted his hand which had his middle finger raised. Duke’s voice shook his ears at the same time.

-We were tricked Jewel. It is a trap!

‘Trap?’

Jewel jumped and stepped backwards.

Clang, snap!

There was a sudden mechanical sound and something sprung from the ground. It was the size of a fist with letters written on the surface. Blood drained from Jewel’s face as he read the letters.

Beok~ kyu!

‘That Ark bastard!’

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The sphere exploded and there was an enormous blast of flame.

“Ugh, Fire Shield!”

Jewel quickly used the Fire Shield to protect himself from the flames. As expected of a pioneer to be able to react so quickly with Fire Shield. But that was just the beginning.

Clang, snap! Clang, snap! Clang, snap! Clang, snap!

While Jewel was protecting himself, 100 other spheres bounced into the village. Sweat dripped down Jewel’s back and he confirmed the presence of the spheres. Needless to say, the spheres which appeared were all traps! These traps sensed the presence of people stepping on

them before activating. It was the type of workmanship that Ark specialized in. But Jewel had no room to be angry. A warning emerged from Jewel's mouth.

"Avoid it! It is a trap!"

Kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwang!

The 100 spheres exploded at the same time and the entire village was in flames. It was a desperate attack on all the secret society members in the village. The sphere exploded before they could react to Jewel's voice. The members quickly lost 10~20% of their health. Moreover, the flames in the village continuously did damage to them.

"Ugh, it is dangerous! Quickly escape!"

"Once we get out of here.....waaaaah!"

The one of the suicide members engulfed in flames suddenly disappeared. The ground had collapsed once he stepped on it. A trap! The bottom of the hole was a trap containing sharpened blades. The man in fell into the trap had his health quickly disappear and he died.

"U-unbelievable.....!"

Jewel looked at the suicide squad members who had fallen into disorder with an expression that indicated he was unable to believe it. It was constant traps that he hadn't even considered! But that wasn't the only thing that confused him.

'T-this is.....!'

Flames were still soaring dozens of metres high in the village. But the buildings in the village were perfectly fine. No, it wasn't just the buildings but also the NPCs going around the village calmly. Jewel knew of only one occupation which could produce this phenomenon.

‘Illusion.....this is an illusion? Then someone conjured the illusion?
But.....’

Conjurers used illusion magic! However, a conjurer could only create an illusion that was several metres in size. Yet the illusion had created a whole village and NPCs who never talked. But one thing was clear in the midst of all the confusion.

‘Ark.....!’

Ark had returned to Lancel village. That’s why the battle proceeded in an unpredictable direction!

“Hehehehe!”

Huge flames and continuous screams continued over the village. Flying over the flames which rose into the sky was a chuckling bat. It was Ark’s scout Racard.

“Master, caught, they were caught. Those fools were properly caught!”

“The flames are also visible from here. What is their situation now?”

“I can’t see properly because of the flames. But judging by the smell of raw meat, quite a few of them were caught?”

“Okay, observe the situation and continue stay in contact with me.”

Ark nodded with satisfaction after listened to Racard’s message. Then he turned his head to the raccoons standing next to him and grinned.

“The traps are working well.”

“It is thanks to the materials Ark-nim brought. I’m also surprised. To think this little jewel has so much power once added to a simple device.”

The raccoon chief said while tinkering with a red gem. It was the Fire Stone Ark excavated from Hwaryong Mountain. When Ark had used the Phantom Hourglass, he also made as many as 180 Fire Stones. Ark had invested half of those stones into this operation. It was the raccoon

chief who thought of adding it to the spheres. The Fire Stones didn't cause that much damage. However, that changed once it was placed in a sphere filled with gunpowder. The explosiveness was amplified by the gunpowder and created unknown damage. Thus the Fire Stones had turned into a bomb.

"And the person with the most merit in this plan is Roco."

The raccoon chief turned his head and muttered.

'Indeed, this plan wouldn't be possible without Roco.'

Ark stared at Roco. Roco was perfectly immersed in playing her harp.

"So awesome, Manager-nim!"

"You weren't just lazing around while playing the harp!"

Sapjil and Ulmeok gave her a thumbs up and praised her. Sapjil and Ulmeok were talking about the time Roco took to learn the 'Rhapsody Melody' from the ghost. 'Melody Rhapsody' was divided into 5 movements, with each movement having a unique effect. And the song Roco was currently playing was the prelude 'Illusion Sonata.'

-Melody Rhapsody Prelude: 【Illusion Sonata】 (Intermediate, Active)

The tragic fate of the genius musician who composed the Melody Rhapsody dwells within the 'Illusion Sonata.' All those who listen to such wonderful magic will be lost in a world of illusion. The people listening to such music on the battlefield will really feel like the main character of a tragedy. Illusion Sonata uses that to target the area where it can project an illusionary landscape. However, the images produced by the illusion have to actually exist. In addition, the realistic sense of the illusion will change depending on the degree of completion.

<Mana consumption: 5 mana every 10 seconds. Cool down time: 12 hours>

Yes, the Lancel village that Jewel's group entered was a mirage created by Illusion Sonata.

'The illusion seems perfect.'

Ark had seen the illusion of Lancel village that appeared not long ago. After Roco had used the Illusion Sonata, Ark had checked the degree of completion. The result was indeed amazing. Even Ark who knew about it in advance was 100% deceived by the illusion. Furthermore, there was no size limit on the illusions that Roco could create. The reason was simple. It was an illusion but the one Roco produced was different from illusion magic. To be exact, it was a hallucination not an illusion. The Illusion Sonata dragged Jewel's group into a fantasy world and made them 'see it as reality.' That's why it could show a ridiculous effect like copying a whole village. Although a Minstrel was treated as a boring profession, music was able to create tremendous illusions like this. It showed that there was more to each profession. The only downside was that the target had to be listening to the music. But that problem was easily solved with Redian using her amplification magic on Roco's harp. Roco's present coverage of the Illusion Sonata was several hundred metres! Jewel's group didn't realize that they were hallucinating because of the music. Then Ark placed traps in advanced and they walked right on top of them.

"It really is rewarding watching those guys suffer."

Ark said with a smirk. Anyway, it wasn't necessary to listen to Racard's live coverage. Those guys undergoing the terrible ordeal in the fake Lancel was only 200 metres away. Therefore Ark could see the rising flames and the screams from Jewel's group. After a while, the screams seemed to decrease and Racard's voice could be heard.

"Master, I think all of them have escaped the traps."

"The damage?"

"Um, there aren't that many that burned. Around 30~40 or so?"

'It wasn't that strong.'

Ark looked disappointed after Racard's report. However Ark hadn't expected that he could deal critical damage to them like this. Even if the bombs maximized the power of the Fire Stones, they were still just traps. At the beginning quite a few of them suffered but once they grasped the situation then they managed to avoid the traps.

'Well the traps were mainly for the magicians and priests who have low health. In a war the magicians and priests have tremendous influence. I've achieved my purpose of reducing the number of priests and magicians. And the illusion hasn't been broken yet.'

"Roco, from now on maintain your maximum output."

"I understand."

Roco's fingers began to move even quicker. Her ten fingers raced like the wind over the 47 strings. Dozens of tones were created and a captivating melody flowed out. Then lights from 3~4 more Lancel villages appeared. The degree of completion of the 'Illusion Sonata' has increased and made it more welcoming.

"Hihihihi, they're overwhelmed and don't know what they're doing!"

Racard giggled as he used satellite surveillance mode to watch them. As expected, Jewel's group were in a state of chaos. But it was impossible for them to retreat now. One by one Jewel's group followed the light. And that was what Ark aimed for.

Snap, bang! Snap, syu syu syu syuk!

The mechanical sounds rang out throughout the forest. He had placed pitfalls along that area. Those guys didn't know about the welcoming lights and just rushed in blindly. He had created a few copies of the same village. Although they weren't stupid so they didn't blindly rush into the village like before. So Ark had buried traps between the different villages. Those guys who were fooled by the lights fell victim to the traps.

‘It won’t deal a serious blow but the damage will cumulate. The cumulative damage will be a significant penalty when the war begins.’

His plan was to take care of the magicians and priests with traps. However, the ones in the forest weren’t traps to deal damage. They were traps to make the magicians and priests consume their mana. If someone was caught in a trap than the magicians and priests would have no choice but to use magic. And even the smallest loss of mana would be helpful on a battlefield.

‘They’ve already lost dozens of priests and magicians and they should’ve lost 20~30% of their mana from the traps. That will increase the chances of winning the war! Of course they will start using scouts to carefully search for traps as they move through the first but it will be good for buying some time.’

Yes, the biggest reason Ark developed this plan was to gain some time. However, that time wasn’t to build up defences for Lancel village. The raccoons had already finished all the defences for Lancel. The reason he needed time wasn’t for defense preparations.....

Snap, syu syu syu syuk!

-The Poison Arrow trap has been activated. 300 damage.

<Thanks to the poison, you will lost 20 mana every 10 seconds for 3 minutes>

“Damn, another poison!”

“Hurry up before I lose any more mana!”

“Dammit.....”

Racard’s live coverage showed the real condition of Jewel’s group. Of course, the ability to detect traps was one of the vocational skills of the Rangers and Hunters. However, the welcoming lights of Lancel were spread out across the forest. In other words, the spreading forest was full of traps. It would take a few days just finding all the traps in the

forest. So Jewel had his warriors with high health and defense lead the group.

If it wasn't possible to find one by one than they planned to ignore it and head straight to Lancel. But the traps in the forest were different from the traps in Lancel. The traps in the illusion were damage oriented traps. Since 100 spheres were triggered at the same time, quite a few magicians and priests with low health were sacrificed. But the traps in the forest had the effect of draining mana. In this situation losing mana was more threatening than losing health. Health could be restored with recovery magic but there was no way to recover mana within a small amount of time. Even if they were warriors, they wouldn't be able to use skills without mana. Skills played a huge role in battle. No matter the level difference, if no skills were available than the odds couldn't be guaranteed. But despite their efforts, the warriors' mana still flew away. In fact, their mana drained even faster as they struggled blindly.

"Jewel, have you caught anything?"

Duke asked in a pained voice.

".....I don't know. I've been using Mana Track but I can't seem to find anything."

But Jewel's answer was also pained. Jewel's original occupation was 'Force Stalker.' The primary accomplishment of a Force Stalker was their ability to trace mana. After changing to his 2nd stage profession 'Force Officer' with the help of the alliance, this mana tracking technique was reinforced even further. Yet Jewel still hadn't found any traces of mana in the forest.

"There are 3~4 villages visible. If the illusion is of this magnitude than wouldn't there be some traces of mana?"

"I'm going crazy."

Jewel murmured in an irritated voice.

'Dammit, there are also people like this at Lancel.....'

Jewel had previously had members of the suicide squads hide around Lancel village. The reason Jewel had them hide beforehand was to keep an eye on Lancel. However, those guys had been caught by Shambala and were now rotting in jail. Therefore Jewel couldn't risk anyone else scouting around the area. They were trapped in the cell but he had received all the basic information so there was no reason to check again. He never imagined that a situation like this could happen. No, in fact the situation would've still been similar even if he scouted beforehand. The suicide squad members didn't just see the illusion inside the village. The illusion was made with many layers that some of them overlapped with the trees. In addition, the night was so dark that not even starlight was visible. It would be difficult for them to identify anything strange in the forest.

"Damn, I should've known that Ark would play a trick like this....."

Then Duke spoke in a worried voice.

"Jewel, should we still proceed with the plan?"

"You want to retreat because of some traps?"

"It's not that. You saw it as well so you know that Ark is in the village. He probably came back after seeing the video."

"Yes, but that was one of the purposes of the video."

Jewel murmured in a cold voice. In fact, Jewel's goal in making Duke film the video wasn't just to scare away users from Lancel. Jewel knew that Ark wasn't in Lancel. That was the main reason why Jewel made the video. If Ark saw the video then he would return to Lancel village. If Ark lost his store and Lancel village then it would be a big blow to him, so he would come rushing back. And that was what drove Jewel's strategy.

"But other users seeing the video is different from Ark seeing it. While users wouldn't have any reaction to the rumours, Ark would move to save the NPCs of that village. Because that fellow cooperates with NPCs a lot. He could also possibly pull in other troops from different areas."

"You still don't understand? That is the reason why the video was posted 18 hours beforehand. Even if they were in the closest city, Ark would be able to move troops in 18 hours. He has no time to bring in reinforcements. That is why he is tying up out ankles with this illusion."

"I guess so."

"Besides, in the video you only commanded 200 troops. Even if Ark called in reinforcements, it would only be enough to deal with 200 troops. But there are actually 500 of us. If that Ark saw us than he would be upset and not know what to do."

Yes, there was a few reasons why Jewel circulated the information on the internet. One was to seal off the users' intervention in the war. Secondly, it was to call Ark back to Lancel. The third reason was to make Ark think that only 200 people were going to attack Lancel. It was a psychological war with three different effects from just one video! However, Jewel was unaware that the psychological war was destroyed by Shambala's eavesdropping. Anyway, they were tricked and received considerable damage from the illusion but Jewel still didn't doubt his victory.

"When we escaped from the village didn't the illusions also increase? It is because he grasped the number of our troops too late. That fellow is intimidated. If we just manage to find the village than Ark will be finished."

".....We just need to find it."

Duke kicked the wreckage of a trap which activated a short while ago with frustration.

"Damn, why is there this sweet music when I am already annoyed?"

"Sweet music?"

"What? You can't hear it? A while ago the background music became rather sweet."

Jewel's eyes narrowed at Duke's answer. In fact, Jewel always had the habit of turning on music in his room while playing the game. In order to find inspiration during this fight, he had turned on a grand marching tune. So he couldn't hear the low music that Duke was talking about.

'What's with the music? Perhaps.....?'

Jewel considered something before turning off his music and listening. Then Jewel could hear the soft sound of a harp in his ear. In New World the background music would change depending on the situation. But the music right now was somewhat strange. Jewel suddenly realized something and shouted.

"That's it, I get it now!"

"What?"

"The reason why I don't see any traces of mana. Damn, we were tricked. The village we saw wasn't an illusion. It is a hallucination! Stupid! That's why I couldn't detect any mana."

"What do you mean? Hallucination?"

"The Minstrel. We've been seeing hallucinations thanks to the Minstrel's music. Damn, there was a Minstrel who followed Ark in Lancel. It is certainly her work!"

Jewel was truly a pioneer as he figured out the entire situation from a small clue. Once he knew the skill of the opponent, it wasn't difficult coming up with a way to handle it.

"Hearing Paralysis!"

Hearing Paralysis was a magic to stop being affected by monsters who used sound attacks like Sirens. If even one person used Hearing Paralysis then they could confirm if the village was a hallucination. When the music was blocked off, the lights in the forest started flickering and gradually disappeared. It seemed like all the villages in the forest were hallucinations. Since he couldn't see any villages with the

hallucinations turned off, it meant that Lancel had turned off its lights and was hiding. In this situation Jewel didn't know the exact location of the village but he just laughed.

'Now that I know what trick he is using, it isn't a problem to find the location.'

It was a Minstrel's skill that was causing the hallucinations. And wherever the music reached was the skill range of the Minstrel.

'The hallucinations began as soon as we entered the forest. And the welcoming lights appeared all over the place. If I apply the scope of the effects then it is obvious that amplification magic has been used. The range of amplification magic is a 500 metres radius. In other words, it is a 1 kilometre diameter.'

Once he grasped that then the real location of Lancel village was clear. He determined the two villages that were most distant from each other. The source of the music had to be somewhere in the centre between those two villages.

"There. There is no doubt!"

Jewel soon found the location of Lancel village. Once he figured out the place, there was no reason to rush and run into the traps. It was obvious that Lancel village was prepared for an attack. On the other hand, the suicide squad members had received quite a bit of damage before the battle even began.

"Scouts, search for traps and secure the path. The remaining members should check their equipment and recover in the meantime. Once the scouts secure the path then we will immediately attack Lancel."

They had already made enough mistakes. No more mistakes would be tolerated.

-I understand.

Since Jewel had used Hearing Paralysis, the members answered using hand signals. Anyway, Jewel carefully rearranged the formation before finally moving through the forest. How much time had passed? Soon they passed through the dense forest and wide, flat ground appeared. There was a village situated at the top of the plains. The village looked pitch black..... Yes, it was Lancel village! They had finally found Lancel village 2 hours after entering the forest.

"We found it!"

Jewel and Duke's eyes lit up as they looked at Lancel village. Then someone suddenly walked forward from the village. Despite the considerable distance, Jewel could still recognize the opponent. It was a wolf with a black mane flying, none other than Ark who was disguised as Dark Wolf. But there was something V shaped sticking out from his head. It was like an insect's antennae. After seeing the antennae of an insect on a wolf, Jewel just laughed.

"Hmm, you found us faster than I thought."

But Jewel couldn't hear since he was deaf. Jewel released Hearing Paralysis and clenched his teeth together.

"You bastard, I'm going to start attacking now!"

"Don't you remember I'm a lot more powerful than you?"

"Shut up, I don't know how you knew and returned to Lancel to play such a trick but our bad relationship ends here. Lancel will die with you!"

Jewel shouted furiously. Ark just looked at Jewel and sighed before shaking his head.

"Hah, why are you so persistent that you even came this far?"

"W-w-w-what? You dare say something like that? After collecting 4,000 gold and a rare item from selling Silvana and interfering with our Seutandal conquest plan, you dare ask why I'm so persistent? What did you just say?"

"I don't understand the meaning of your words."

Ark looked at him with a pitiful look and clicked his tongue.

"While you have a somewhat spicy taste, you're not worthy of being my opponent. Yet you couldn't grasp this and still attacked? Do you want to give me even more money? Do you even have anything left to give? I'm thankful but my heart is quite troubled by it. Why don't you just leave peacefully this time while you can?"

"W-what? This bastard.....! Talking like that....."

Ark's words caused Jewel's blood pressure to ruse. But after a moment, he clenched his teeth and shouted orders.

"Attack! Kill, kill! Do whatever it takes to defeat him!"

"Wah ah ah ah!"

The 500 suicide squad members raised their weapons and rushed forward. Then Ark turned back and shouted.

"Standby!"

The lights in Lancel village turned on at Ark's voice. When the lights turned on, Lancel village became so bright it was like broad daylight. Jewel's eyes which had been adapted to the darkness winced from the sudden light.

Chwa, chwa, chwa, chwa, chwa, chwa!

Smalls screens abruptly rose in front of Ark. Inside the village surrounded by stone ways, 15 screens shot up in every direction. Ark laughed at the suicide squad members and laughed pleasantly before shouting.

"The system has signalled a green light. Action!"

"Wah ah ah ah!"

It was at that time. All of a sudden, here was a thundering shout and warriors hiding behind the stone wall stood up. Jewel's face was dyed with confusion at the troops. The soldiers which appeared from behind the stone wall weren't residents of Lancel. The hundreds of warriors were all users!

"Huk, this is....."

Jewel hesitated with a perplexed expression. The secret society members had only posted the video of them attacking users 18 hours ago. It was natural for the users to become scared and leave Lancel. But what was up with all the users?

"It was quite a good idea making that video and distributing it."

Ark laughed at his expression and muttered.

"But it's nothing compared to the game being broadcasted."

"B-broadcasted?"

Jewel's face caught from different angles then appeared on the 15 split screens.

Act 4: Media Power

"I guess it has begun now."

A man muttered as he looked at the clock on the wall. With a bushy beard and thick potbelly, it was a man in his late thirties wearing pyjamas. He looked like any ordinary father living next door. And he was actually a common neighbourhood ajusshi. But that was in reality. Once he entered through the magic door to a fantasy world called New World he was Raiden, the leader of the Hermes alliance filled with hundreds of people. Yes, this ajusshi was the leader of the Hermes alliance Raiden! It was currently 8 o'clock in the morning. It was still too

early to be active in the game. Raiden's normal pattern was to log on at 12 o'clock. However he had been unable to sleep last night.

"It has to work....."

It wasn't possible to hide his anxiety as Raiden muttered before taking out a cigarette. The reason he had a sleepless night was because today was 'the day.' It was the formal debut stage of the Hermes alliance's secret society!

"Today I will see if the secret suicide squad can play an active role."

Raiden had a lot of expectations towards the suicide squad. No, to be exact they were the only thing he could rely on. It wasn't necessary to explain but the Hermes alliance was in massive debt after the lawless port was destroyed. That was not the whole problem. At the time, Raiden had gathered funds from the alliance to invest into construction of the lawless port. The amount of profit gained from the lawless port depended on the funds invested. If it had gone as planned and they were able to recapture Seutandal then the dividends would be enormous. The lawless port seemed to be a business plan with a 100% success rate. In addition, Seutandal would be a golden goose once it was recaptured! Everybody in the Hermes alliance invested with the dream of making a fortune and the lawless port was able to be created in a short amount of time. But the lawless port was smashed before it could give any profits. At the same time, the investments of the alliance members became toilet paper overnight. Whether it be dozens of gold or hundreds of gold, all the alliance members' blames were directed at Raiden. That wasn't all. The person who most believed in the success of the lawless port plan was Raiden himself! He believed that shares in the lawless port was a guaranteed blue chip (stock where growth, profitability and stability was secured) and he believed that the one who held the most shares would profit the most. He had mobilized his offline and online contacts and prepared money to invest. Thanks to that, Raiden was backed into a corner in both New Word and reality.

'But if the suicide squad succeeds today.....'

As much as 10,000 gold (from the lawless port stolen goods) would come into his possession. It wouldn't be enough to settle all his problems but it would turn off the heat.

'There is also one more important thing aside from the money coming in today. I will be able to gauge if the secret society will be profitable. In the words of Jewel, obtaining the 10,000 gold won't be a problem. It will be possible to recover all our losses and have a reserve source of income if they prove successful today.'

"And once again Seutandal..... Huhuhu, hahaha!"

Raiden cackled at the thought of the rosy future. Then the door suddenly opened and a sharp voice could be heard.

"Shut up! You're laughing when I just received an early morning call from debt collectors!"

A woman who was Raiden's wife yelled into his ear. Raiden winced and closed his mouth before stuttering.

"Oh, no, this is....."

"I really can't live like this. How could you borrow money without saying a word to me? Do you know what it is like receiving called from loan companies? If you don't pay it off within a week then they will send someone!"

"U-understood. It can be solved today if everything goes well."

"Bah, are you certain? I'll tell you in advance but I can't live with debt-stricken people. If you don't fix it in a few days then I will take the children and go to my parent's house!"

His wife shouted as she poked him angrily.

'Damn, I have to pay off that borrowed money.'

Raiden continued smoking while sighing. He had stayed up all night chain smoking. He couldn't possibly eat until he heard news of Jewel's

victory. Well, if he didn't pay back the money then his wife wouldn't be setting the table for him. Raiden restlessly pulled out some milk from the refrigerator. He was drinking the milk when his son turned on the TV and its sound could be heard.

"Today's game exclusive scoop will be a special live broadcast!"

'Game exclusive scoop? Is it already that time?'

Raiden drank the milk and turned his eyes towards the TV.

Originally the game exclusive scoop was broadcasted once a week during the evening. But since viewers started to protest that the information was coming in too late so a program called 'game scoop hot issues' began in the morning hours.

'Anyway this is a special live broadcast? Had an event begun in New World?'

"I'm curious about the special live broadcast. Since it wasn't in the schedule."

The female reporter asked the question that Raiden was wondering about. And the host laughed and nodded.

"It's not a surprise that you don't know. I heard some talk a few hours ago and decided in a hurry. But there is no doubt that every minute will be interesting. I'm very curious in the results as well."

"Ah, your words have made me even more curious. The audience is also interested so please tell me quickly."

"I understand. But before that, have you seen the video titled 'Crime File' which spread like wildfire over the internet yesterday?"

"Yes, I received a notification from my friend and watched it. Since beginners from Schudenberg often visit the Haruna camp. I've also been there before but the NPC captain of Haruna was really beautiful and kind. Seeing such a good NPC get killed was really heartbreaking. Well,

a new NPC appeared not long afterwards in the game but he is just a bearded grandfather.”

The female reporter said with a deliberately angry expression. Then the host laughed loudly and nodded.

“Hahaha, I know as well. While users have killed NPCs before, this is the first time an NPC village was decimated so it is was a shocking incident. But the even more shocking contents of the video was the advance attack notice.”

“A village called Lancel.”

“That’s correct. Lancel village is located in the Argus Mountains in Schudenberg. After building the village, it has been rapidly growing thanks to its eager residents. In addition, there are many unique goods and a variety of species so the village has been quite famous these days.”

“Are they going to be killed like the residents of Haruna camp?”

“Yes, that might be so. But where there is evil in the world, there is also justice.”

The host shook his finger and spoke.

“The thieves who appeared on the video are strong and vicious. When they said they would attack Lancel, I thought all the users would run away. However justice is still alive. Surprisingly many people have decided to oppose the bandit group! And even more amazingly, the one who rallied them to stand against the thieves is none other than Dark Wolf!”

“Omo, isn’t Dark Wolf the one who became a hot topic after Seutandal rose?”

“That’s correct. The hero who caused Seutandal to rise will make an appearance on the game exclusive scoop! After he heard the news, he ran to Lancel and rallied the users to fight against the bandit group. And the combat scene of him fighting against the thieves will be aired live!”

Then a lamp which was placed in front of the host started shining.

The person standing nearby wearing earphones received instructions and nodded, causing the host to shout.

“The images are being transmitted now. We will see the true identities of the thieves who attacked the NPC village and see if Dark Wolf can stop them, creating a new legend. All the viewers are cheering for Dark Wolf.”

Puhak!

Milk spouted like a fountain from Raiden’s mouth as he idly watched the screen. The face which filled Raiden’s 54 inch LED TV was Jewel.

After seeing Jewel’s face on the TV, his six year old son asked.

“Eh? Isn’t that the person who appeared in a video with Daddy before? Isn’t that ajusshi Daddy’s subordinate? Then Daddy is also bad like him?”

“Oh, no! I don’t know that person!”

Raiden wildly shook his head.

‘Huhuhu, that Jewel still doesn’t know what is going on.’

Ark laughed at Jewel’s confused expression. Yes, this was the method Ark came up with 18 hours before. In order to oppose the Crime File circulating the internet, he had received the help of the broadcasting station!

Ark had been desperate before he thought of that method. If the Crime File scared users off then Lancel would only have 300 people protecting it. On the other hand, Jewel’s force numbered 500 people. Furthermore, they also had high levels. No matter how he thought, he couldn’t think of a method to win. In order for the mission to be a success, he had to ensure that the damage to NPCs and the village remained below 30%. But in order to reduce damage to the residents, he would have to

sacrifice the village and vice versa. Those two challenges weren't compatible at the same time. And if that quest failed then the <Find New Settlers> quest he spent 1 and a half years on would also fail. That wasn't all. If the town received a serious blow then the real estate price would slump! Even if Ark managed to stop the thieves, Ark had no choice but to submit to considerable damage.

'The only way to minimize the damage is through the users.....'

While they were only level 100~150, it would be possible to do something with those numbers. Furthermore, if the users died then Ark wouldn't receive any damage. He could use risky strategies without any burden.

However, the users would be too scared from the 'Crime File' to be hired as mercenaries anymore. Then Ark's eyes caught sight of the business card with the name of the journalist from the game exclusive news on it. In fact after the 'Netherworld exploration of a Wicked Wolf' video, Ark had been contacted many times by the game scoop reporter. The viewers were really interested in the identity of the black wolf so the reporter wanted him to appear on the broadcast. However Ark had refused the offer. While he would receive a performance fee for going on the broadcast, he wasn't an entertainer so the fee would be small. The amount wasn't large enough to tempt him. Ark knew that having his face on the broadcast might have even bigger disadvantages. No, he wasn't going to show his face for that amount of money.

'But it won't be a problem if it is a video of the game. And if it is broadcasted on the TV.....?'

Ark's thoughts rolled around wildly and he quickly called the broadcasting station.

"Dark Wolf-nim, you're accepting the offer to appear on the broadcast?"

"No. I have a different request today."

Ark explained what he wanted to the reporter.

“Do you know the Crime File which circulated a while ago? That bandit group will be raiding Lancel village tomorrow. I was wondering if you wanted to broadcast the battle?”

“The battle of Lancel village? Tell me more.”

Although the Crime File had circulated on the internet, it had also attracted close attention from the game exclusive news. Because users giving an advance notice before they attacked an NPC village was unusual. Naturally, the plan was for the game exclusive news to dispatch a reporter in New World to the site.

“Could it be that Dark Wolf-nim is also participating in the village?”

“It’s not just me. From the Evil Silrion, Blue Sword also known as Shambala and Bristania’s strongest pair Bread and Redian will also appear in the battle to defend Lancel.”

“Is that true?”

The reporter from the game exclusive news was excited by Ark’s proposal. Since the game exclusive news was based on information about New World, naturally he knew the names Bread and Redian. Not only Dark Wolf, but the Crime File video was also an incredible topic. Blue Sword, Bread and Redian were also going to be there! It was to the extent that everybody in New World would be interested in the video! If they broadcasted it then the audience ratings would be secured.

“Team Leader-nim, it is a huge event!”

“What? Dark Wolf, Shambala, Bread and Redian are all going to appear in Lancel village? There’s no need to think about it. Organize the airtime immediately! Schedule an opening in the hot issues section which will be followed by the video of the battle!”

It was given the green light.

“Are there any reporters close to Lancel village?”

“There is. We have some reporters in Giran ready to film the scene of Lancel being attacked by the thieves.”

“That’s great. Then tell them to quickly make contact with Dark Wolf!”

“By the way, Dark Wolf says he will edit it directly from that site and send in the video.”

“What? Why?”

“I think he wants to ensure that the scene comes out wonderfully.”

The reporter scratched his head and muttered. But it was in fact the opposite. No, the reason Ark wanted to be the director of the camera was to ‘hide that thing.’ In this battle, it was inevitable that he would sacrifice the users’ lives to protect the NPCs and the village. Of course he would have to give some unreasonable commands. Then wouldn’t it be broadcasted to the entire country? However, the Team Leader didn’t know Ark’s intentions and nodded without thinking.

“Anyway, the viewers will show a huge amount of interest since Dark Wolf is entering the war. The appearance of Dark Wolf isn’t bad. Tell the reporters who will make contact with Dark Wolf to do whatever he says. This fight that will be televised live will be a hot issue!”

And approximately 10 hours ago, a reporter from the game exclusive news arrived in Lancel. He established a simple base station at Lancel village to film the battle. Then 15 cameras and equipment to connect it to the broadcasting station was installed. And the person who was controlling the images was Ark! The antennae on top of his head was to relay the information from the 15 cameras to the base station.

‘Huhuhu, it really is a brilliant idea!’

Ark looked at the hundreds of users who appeared on the screen and smirked. There was a reason Ark dragged the broadcasting station into this. Ark implemented his plan shortly after the reporter arrived in Lancel village. Ark transformed into Dark Wolf and called the users to the square along with the reporter.

“Everyone please pay attention!”

“What? We’re busy.... Eh? That person?”

“Dark Wolf! Dark Wolf who caused Seutandal to rise!”

The users who were busy trying to escape after seeing the Crime File stopped and started paying attention. Most users in New World had seen the video, so there was nobody who didn’t know about Dark Wolf. After their attention focused on him, Ark quickly started talking.

“Everybody already knows this but the bandit group which appeared in the Crime File is planning to attack Lancel tomorrow. There is no time to receive help from other villages in this area. If this is left alone then Lancel will be plundered like they planned.”

Ark said as he looked at the users.

“Are you really going to just sit back and watch? Even though it is an NPC village, this is a place of shelter within the Argus Mountains. Yet they want to trample this place! Are you going to ignore the users who intend to destroy this shelter?”

“That is true however.....”

“We still haven’t completed all the quests in this village.....”

“But.....those fellows will attack NPCs as well as loot the village. There is no reason for us to intrude in vain.....”

The users whispered among each other. In fact, the users didn’t want Lancel village to be threatened. Lancel village was the only resting place for users hunting in the Argus Mountains. It was also unnecessary to say that users received quests from Lancel village. But the burden was too big for them to participate in the battle.

“I will not tolerate the atrocities of those fellows. No matter what, I will oppose them and protect Lancel. And just now, the game exclusive news

has decided to live broadcast the battle of Lancel during the 'hot issues' section."

"What? The game exclusive news?"

"That's correct. This person right here is a reporter from the game exclusive news."

Ark pointed towards the reporter. Then the users started buzzing around with astonished voices.

"That's right, I've seen that reporter before on the game exclusive news."

"Then the battle for Lancel village will really be broadcasted on the TV?"

"If we fight in the battle then we'll appear on TV?"

The users gradually began to understand the situation. There was a serious chance that their characters in New World could be broadcasted! Ark then drove another wedge in the shaken users.

"Everybody knows that Lancel village will be attacked by those in the Crime File tomorrow. We have to stop it. And if we win the battle then you'll be a hero. Naturally users who show more achievements will receive more attention. Those users might be given a chance for an interview. Isn't that right?"

"Ah yes, that is....."

The reporter nodded his head. Lights appeared in the users' eyes at that reply. A TV which a common house appliance which was spread out all over the world. But now they had a chance to appear on it. Plus, if they did something notable then there was a chance for an interview. Anybody would be happy about a chance to appear on TV! The players were buzzing for a while before one user stood up and shouted.

"That's right, we can't just rest while the village is attacked by thieves!"

"Besides, the hero of Seutandal Dark Wolf is also here!"

“Let’s all fight together!”

The attitude of the users changed 180 degrees once they heard the word ‘TV.’ While a video might die down quickly, appearing on TV was no comparison. Thanks to that, the users now swarmed and frantically tried to apply to participate.

“Oh, a celebrity!”

“If my character appears on TV then I can boast to my girlfriend!”

“Eh, what? It’s true. The Lancel battle will be broadcasted live on the game exclusive news. Huh? Of course. Where? Don’t make me laugh and just return soon! This is the opportunity to be a celebrity! Don’t worry about your equipment being taken away!”

Some users even whispered to their friends who had already run away.

‘Huhuhu, this stupid crowd!’

Ark inwardly smiled with satisfaction as he looked at the user. Yes, this was the reason why Ark dragged in reporter from the game exclusive news. An appearance on TV. This also had another effect aside from gathering users. With the images being streamed on the television, it was impossible for them to cowardly run away or disobey orders if the situation became difficult. If they had to die while on TV then they would rather die with honour.

‘You’re already my puppets. Now I can control you as I wish!’

Thus Ark was able to get his hands on 400 people free of charge. Despite their levels, these puppets were those who didn’t fear death and would submit to his orders.

‘Also Jewel’s group has been perfectly branded as a villain!’

Ark looked at Jewel with a stupid smile. Ark was managing all the images shown in the live broadcast. And the picture he sent to the broadcasting station was that of Jewel’s face! The close up shot of the

villain attacking Lancel village was displayed for the whole country to see. Of course the TV broadcasts didn't have any influence on New World. But at least Jewel's face was imprinted sharply in the minds of players in New World. Even if he managed to lose his chaotic status later on, it wouldn't be easy for him to get along with other users. Jewel had already lost even before the start of the battle. And it wasn't just Jewel, it also applied to Duke and the rest of the group. However Jewel still hadn't grasped the situation.

"What the hell? How come these users are still in the village?"

Jewel couldn't understand and just stared at the users. He hadn't expected that all the users would run away after watching the Crime File. But at least 70-80% would've run away. However, there were at least 400 users standing in front of him. It seemed like the numbers had actually increased instead of decreasing. Furthermore, there was an unusual fighting spirit in the users' eyes. But there was a reason for it.

"Hey, did you see?"

"Yes, I just checked right now and it really appeared on TV."

"It was only for a little bit but my face definitely appeared."

"Really?"

"Thankfully I'm taping it!"

"If we participate then we'll become celebrities like Dark Wolf!"

"Will we make a new legend?"

After seeing that it was broadcasted on TV, the morale of the players increased even more. But Jewel didn't know that and was frightened by their intention to fight. Jewel was only able to understand one thing.

'There's no mistake, that bastard has definitely arranged some schemes!'

"Leader-nim?"

“There’s no need to worry! Those guys are only level 100~150 at the most! It might become a little more troublesome but our victory is still assured! It will go as planned. We’ll show them what will happen if they try to attack us! Step on them one by one!”

“Charge!”

Snap, snap, chwa chwa chwa chwa!

Dozens of members from the suicide squad rushed forward. They were wearing thick metal armour, shields and holding spears! They were the assaulters, the profession with the strongest breakthrough power in New World.

“Break through into Lancel! Dash!”

“Wah ah ah ah!”

The assaulters used their shields and spears and surged forward.

“Heok, it is the assaulters!”

“Stop them! If you collide with them then some will fall down!”

The users became confused and started firing magic and arrows. But.....ting, ting, ting, ting! The magic and arrows just bounced off the shields. It was the defensive power of the assaulters who had the strongest breakthrough power! The Assaulters also consisted of the highest ranking users in the suicide squad. Level 300! When the assaulters used their skill ‘Dash’, the movement speed increased by 50% while their defense increase by 30%. There level 100~150 were unable to stop the rush. Thanks to the thrust from the assault corps, Lancel’s defences quickly became disorderly!

“So they appeared like I expected.”

However Ark was still composed. Jewel’s purpose was to destroy Lancel village. It was expected that they would use the assault corps as

soon as they began to break through to Lancel. It was impossible for Ark not to prepare for such an obvious attack.

“Hahaha! Those stupid guys, I’ll make sure they regret jumping in so rashly.....”

One of the assaulters rushing forward suddenly disappeared. It wasn’t just one person. One by one more assaulters started disappearing.

“What, what the? Why.....?”

Jewel looked at the sight with puzzled eyes. Only then did he discover that a hole had appeared where the assaulter disappeared. Holes had been dug all over the place and camouflaged using wooden branches.

“A pitfall trap? That guy, still using such boring methods until the end..... But they are assaulters. A trap like that won’t be enough to give them a fatal wound. They’ll soon leave the trap.....”

“Will that be possible?”

Ark laughed and murmured.

Tutututung, pepepepeng!

All of a sudden there were loud sounds and smoke rose from the hole. What had just happened? While Jewel was still looking, some assaulters climbed out of the hole with looks of fear on their faces. But before they could fully exit, a black hand grabbed their arms and legs and pulled them back in. There was a violent sound and the assaulter disappeared again.

“Aaaaack!”

‘What is happening in that hole.....?’

Jewel stared with shocked eyes until some ears emerged from the hole again. They were ears that he had seen on an NPC before.

‘They previously accompanied Ark.....!’

Yes, the hand while pulled the shocked warrior into the hole was a raccoon. The hole and the raccoons was the plan that Ark devised to deal with the assaulters. In other words, the holes that the assaulters fell into weren't a trap. They were complicated underground tunnels created using the raccoons specialty. Then Ark covered the entrance to the underground passages using the wooden branch and camouflaged it. The assaulters wore heavy armour so they were vulnerable to fall damage. It was natural for them to be 'stunned' by the impact of falling! Then the raccoons waiting in the underground passage would swarm and shoot them with the cannons. Even with their high defense, the assaulters were unable to withstand the barrage of so many cannon fire while in a 'stunned' state. It was a 100% chance of death once they fell into the hole!

"This is ridiculous.....!"

Jewel's mouth started foaming. Jewel had thought it was just traps laid out. But he believed in the assaulter's defense and judged that it was possible to ignore the traps. He never could've guessed that it would turn out this way. However, 'Dash' had already begun. While 'Dash' boasted overwhelming breakthrough power, its weak point was that it couldn't be stopped until the skill was finished. No, even if Jewel told them to stop then they wouldn't be able to.

'The raccoon holes are unexpectedly but only 10 assaulters fell into the hole. There are still 30 of them left. 30 assaulters are enough to shatter their defences! Once their rampage stops then I will reorganize their formation and batter their defences!'

Just like Jewel said, there were still 30 assaulters who managed to reach the users. If the assaulters collided with them then it was possible to shatter dozens of users! The overwhelming power might also impact the moral of the users! Once the suicide squad broke in then any hope those users had would be lost. Clearly the users would run away with fright. Then the assaulters rushed into the users like Jewel planned! Ark then jumped onto a user's shoulders and raised the Saw blade.

"Razak, transformation off! Iron Fire Wall activate!"

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

The Saw blade transformed back into Razak. But Razak's outward appearance was different from before. Previously he carried around a tattered shield but now it was one covered in flames. It was a magnificent fire shield which looked like a skull!

Clack clack clack clack clack!

Razak shouted (?) and raised his shield over his head.

Kwa kwa kwa kwa kwang, pepepepeng, hwarrrrruk!

At the same time, wings of fire opened up on either side of the shield and hit the assaulters. The assaulters that had been travelling at top speed wobbled and fell. This was the power of Razak's new 'Blazing Fire Draconian Shield!' After Ark gave the Fire Draconian Skull to the raccoons, they had made the 'Blazing Fire Draconian Shield' out of it. Frankly, Ark never imagined that a shield would be created from it. Since the information couldn't be confirmed, he thought that an unusual item would be made. Because wasn't the material a skull? Yet an unexpected shield for Razak was created.

-Blazing Fire Draconian Shield (Rare)

Armour type: Steel Shield

Defense: 250

Durability: 150/150

Weight: 70

User Restriction: Exclusive use for a Skeleton Warrior

A shield made with the skull of the Fire Draconian Oracle Lumines. The oracle was originally had a mission to protect the Fire Draconian species so the oracles have learnt strong protective magic. All the protection magic that Lumines has learnt over the hundreds of years has been

concentrated in this skull. A skilled craftsman can create a powerful artifact out of this skull. But only those with a deep understanding of bones will be able to draw out all the power within the skull.

<Option: Strength +10, Stamina +10>

<Special Option: 'Iron Fire Wall' is available. Iron Fire Wall uses the magic of the shield to stop the enemies 'Dash' within a 10 metre area. When the skill is activated, 10~100 fire damage will be dealt. Once 'Dash' is cancelled, the opponent will fall into a 'stunned' state. However, only warriors who have learnt 'Shield Stroke' can use this skill.

Mana consumption:100 Cool down time: 5 minutes>

'This is worth the 200 gold production cost.'

Ark looked warmly at the shield roaring with fire. A rare shield with a special option attached was a lot different from a general magic shield. With the special option, Razak has another defensive skill. The Iron Fire Wall had the ability to stop the enemy's rush when within a 10 metre area! The skill alone was worth more than 200 gold. The problem was that it was a pet exclusive item so it would be difficult to sell. But if it was an item to this degree then he wouldn't want to sell it. Thanks to that, his summons managed to stop the 'Dash' of the 30 assaulters. It also caused flame damage and a 'stun' effect!

"Kuaaaaak!"

Thanks to the stun effect, the assaulters couldn't move a finger.

'That's it. The cool down time of Iron Fire Wall is 5 minutes. It is similar to the cool down time of the warrior's 'Dash.' Then I can block their next Dash.'

Razak had also been steadily eating food so his current stats were equivalent to level 290. So that stat difference wasn't that much compared to Jewel's group. Moreover, Razak had also received

considerable training from Ark so is combat abilities weren't inferior. Using the 'Blazing Fire Draconian Shield,' it was possible to stop the 'Dash.'

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Even without the need for Ark's commands, Razak knew to use his shield and was the main axis of the users' defense. It was a scene where he could see Razak's growth.

'That's it, their momentum has been broken. Now.....!'

Ark raised his fist and let out a large roar.

"Now's the time. Exterminate the villains who are threatening the peace of New World!"

"Waaaaaah, for New World!"

Then a wave of 400 users raised their weapons and rushed Jewel's group. The users.....the first group they attacked was the assaulters affected by 'stun.' The assaulters were normally an impregnable wall of defense. But that didn't matter. Although the users were only level 100~150, there were still 400 of them.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The users swarmed like a group of ants and the assaulters instantly lost all their health. Since they were caught by 'stun', the only thing the assaulters could do was send an SOS signal.

"S-save me!"

"These bastards..... Stop them! Block those guys!"

"Damn, these guys are like mayflies..... Smash them all!"

Jewel's plan to smash the users with 'Dash' failed so their group had no more room to breathe. They had to mobilize their power before colliding with the users. Thanks to the imitation of Lancel village created by

Illusion Sonata, Jewel's group had quite a few casualties. And now the 40 assaulters had also received damage. But Jewel still had more than 400 forces left. Despite having the same numbers as the users, their level was higher! So Jewel's group thought they could smash them quickly but the users were surprisingly persistent.

"To the tired bodies, listen to this cheerful song."

A soft singing voice could be heard over the steel clanging sounds and screams of the battlefield. It was the Minstrel Roco singing from Lancel. A Minstrel's singing buff! While the priests and magicians could also apply buffs, the buffs of a Minstrel were different. While the Minstrel specialized in buffs, unlike the magician they couldn't use any attacks. That was the reason why users avoided becoming minstrels. In other words, it was just a profession that specialized in buffs. When Roco used her support magic from the rear, message windows appeared in front of the users.

-The Advanced 'Song of Life' effect has been applied.

<You will recover 600 health within 3 minutes>

-The Advanced 'Song of Wind' effect has been applied.

<Your attack speed will increase by 15% for 10 minutes>

-The Advanced 'Song of the Brave' effect has been applied.

<Your attack and defense will increase by 10% for 10 minutes>

Roco's many skills had increased to advanced level after training with Melody. And thanks to Gentle Reverberation, it was possible to stack the effects three times. But that strong point of a Minstrel was something else. A priest and magician could only apply buffs on 5~10 people maximum. Furthermore, buffs consumed mana so they couldn't fire it continuously. On the other hand, the minstrel's buff applied to all allies who heard the music. One buff could affect 400 people at once. The efficiency of the buff was like the difference between heaven and earth.

"Damn, that stupid female again.....!"

Jewel aggressively glared at Roco. But the problem wasn't just Roco.

"Why on earth are these guys just jumping in rashly?"

Jewel shot out fire and muttered as some users were burnt. No matter how many buffs Roco used, the level difference was overwhelming. Even if three or four people attacked one person, it would still be difficult. But the users just jumped it recklessly like that wasn't a problem. Plus.....

"Kuaaaack, it is regrettable. But at least I defended the justice of New World before I died....."

"Heok! Damn, can I only last until here? Yeong-sook, I love you!"

The users talked nonsense even while collapsing. They were putting on an act because they were conscious of the broadcast. But Jewel couldn't understand the circumstances.

"This is irritating. What happened to the weakening effect of the Crime File? Then I'll have to let them know it isn't a joke. 1st unit, surround the enemy on your right flank! Make them realize this isn't a joke!"

"Yes. 1st unit, surround a target!"

Soon dozens of the suicide squad members had surrounded a few users. They simultaneously took out a scroll and used them. It was the chaotic scrolls which could turn users into beggars in no time! If that many users were turned into beggars then they would realize it wasn't a joke.

"Aw, it is the chaotic scrolls!"

"If we're hit by those scrolls then our equipment might drop!"

As expected, the users stopped once the chaotic scrolls were used. Once the obvious threat was used, clearly the users would realize it wasn't a joke and would run away.....but they didn't.

"Your opponent is me! Use the scrolls on me!"

“I’m not scared of those scrolls!”

Instead of shrinking away from the scrolls, the users were even more fired up.

“W-what is this.....?”

It was impossible for Jewel to understand the users’ reactions. But there was a small smile on Ark’s face who was watching from a distance away.

‘Huhuhu, that method is more effective than I thought.’

The users weren’t afraid of the scroll because of something Ark devised. Thanks to the broadcast, he had succeeded in engaging users without wasting any money. However the situation could change if Jewel used the chaotic scrolls. Since it was being broadcasted then they wouldn’t run away, but there was no telling how they would waver on the battlefield.

‘Is there a way to stop the users’ fear of the scrolls?’

Ark thought for a bit before coming up with a brilliant idea. It was the contract that was in each user’s bag. When looking at the terms of the contract, it said.

-A Merchant’s Agreement.

<Contractor: Ark’s Store= Users who signed the insurance>

When users insures one of their items and pay the relevant insurance price of 5%, the contract will be signed. If the relevant item is dropped while fighting the thieves in Lancel village, Ark’s store will pay 200% of the price.

“This.....insurance?”

“Yes, in fact I’ve been a regular customer of the famous Ark’s store for many years. The staff are always friendly and you can get high quality items for a cheaper price than other places..... Anyway, I discussed

with the store manager about a way to reduce everybody's burden. They eventually came to the conclusion of offering everybody insurance."

Ark showed the contract like an insurance sales representative and said.

"You can insure a valuable item for 5% of the market price and if you drop that item during the battle then Ark's store will pay you back 200%."

"R-really?"

The players' eyes widened at Ark's words. In this battle users were most concerned about dropping their equipment! Yet if they paid the 5% insurance price first they would be able to receive 200% of the market price if they dropped the item? Rather, wouldn't they receive a profit if they dropped the item? After quickly calculating, the users immediately bought 'Ark's Compensation Insurance.' Thanks to that, the scrolls from Jewel's group weren't a threat anymore. Rather, some people aimed to get hit by the scroll in order to receive the payout.

"These guys....."

Jewel was completely puzzled. But Ark was hiding another trick within that scheme. The equipment was from level 100~150 users. The price of the equipment would only be hundreds of thousands of won. On the other hand, the price of the scrolls Jewel used in the Crime File cost dozens of gold. Even if the equipment was taken away using the scrolls, it wouldn't be profitable. Despite using the scrolls on all the users in the Crime File, it could hardly be used on a battlefield.

'They will probably use the scrolls a few time at the beginning to scare the users. Once intimidated then there is no more need to use the scrolls.'

In the end, only 12 users actually ended up dropping equipment! Then the rest of the users' insurance payment all went into Ark's pocket. So despite some equipment dropping, Ark would still 100% make a profit. But users were scared by the Crime File and signed the insurance for 3~4 equipment. So lots of users paid 3~4 gold per person and some even paid 20 gold. He could receive a profit of 3,800 gold! Even if he had

to pay the insurance money to some people, he would still receive a profit of 2,500 gold. The business was a big hit thanks to their anxiety.

‘Huhuhu, this insurance business is profitable.....’

Ark had used the insurance money to mobilize the users to fight!

“It is like I’m meeting you for the first time again. You really are scary.”

Shambala shook his head with a tired look.

However Ark just ignored him.

“Why are you still laughing? You’ve tricked those morons into fighting but it doesn’t change the fact that they have more power.”

“I know. Now I will move in earnest. Are you ready?”

“I’m always ready. Where do we begin?”

“There place where there is the most money of course.”

Ark replied with a wicked grin.

“You really never stop.”

Ark laughed at Shambala’s words and nodded. After a short time, Ark and Shambala plunged into the battlefield.

Act 5: Under their Feet.....

Kwa kwa kwa bang, flash-!

A flash of light ripped through the darkness. The sky had been cloudy since the early evening and now it was pouring heavy rain with occasional lightning. But even the heavy rain couldn’t cool off the heat of the magnificent battle.

“Wah ah ah ah!”

“These guys who have no idea of fear, die!”

“Shut up, you villains! We’ll defend the peace of New World!”

The users didn’t rest and kept on swinging their weapons towards Jewel’s party. In the heavy rainfall, hundreds of people were tangled together and their use of skills caused various flashes in the darkness. When the flashes reflected off the raindrop, an amazing firework like view could be seen. The two groups plunged towards each other like lions in the light.

“These bastards, so sloppy..... Annihilate all of them! The great spirits of the wind.....”

Then an Elemental Shaman stared at a user and chanted a spell. It was a wide area magic! In a battle, the magicians’ wide area attack was the most devastating attack. It was risky if used incorrectly, but the wide area magic was something which could completely change the situation. Especially considering the huge level difference between the secret society and the users. For lower level users, their magic resistance would be low so wide area magic would deal them a fatal blow.

“Huck, a wide area magic!”

The users discovered too late that an Elemental Shaman was chanting a wide area spell.

“Huhuhu, it is too late. One with the wind.....”

Then just as the wide area magic was about to be completed.....

“Over here!”

One person shot an arrow in the darkness. Then something kicked the Elemental Shaman’s chin as the arrow impacted with their knee. The magician mouth was forced shut and the spell was cancelled. The man who interrupted the spell landed nimbly on the ground.

"It would be dangerous if that was completed."

"Ack, my teeth.....heok, you're Ark!"

"I'm thankful that you recognize me but I'm busy so please die."

Ark laughed and stabbed the Elemental Shaman in the back. Next he used Dark Blade and combined with backstab, 30% of the Elemental Shaman's health was instantly lost. The Elemental Shaman tried to attack but it wasn't easy once Ark caught his target. Ark used Dark Dance to attach himself like a leech and hurled quick attacks.

"Ugh, over here! Ark is over here!"

The Elemental Shaman who was in a critical condition screamed and tried to run away. Then four of the secret society members ran up and acted like a bodyguard to the Elemental Shaman. But Ark didn't pay any attention to the attacks of the secret society members. No, to be exact there was no reason to pay attention to it.

"This bastard, you'll die for rushing in here recklessly!"

The secret society members said as they swung their weapons towards Ark. Then a black shadow suddenly appeared at Ark's back.

".....He didn't come alone you morons. Sun, Gae, Yeol, Seom!"

The black shadow who muttered was Shambala who spoke in a cold voice. A blue dagger flew through the darkness towards them. When Shambala followed, dozens of daggers were stabbed into the body of the secret society members. It was a skill which summoned daggers made of mana which increased damage by 10 times, 'Ten Strikes.' It was Shambala's new skill which he received after changing his occupation to 'God Killer.' The secret society members were hit with 'poison' and 'bleed,' causing their health to drain quickly. But that was just the beginning. Shambala also used his 'Cruciate Flower Wave' which had reached Master level to attack the members. After taking care of the escaping Elemental Shaman, Ark approached the group to help.

“Is it tough taking care of them by yourself?”

“Don’t play around. This much is just entertainment for me.”

“Well I’ll help since I’m already here. Dark Blade!”

“Sheesh, you want me to hand them over? Cruciate Flower Wave!”

It was the pair of Ark and Shambala that had conquered the Evil Silrion! The secret society members who couldn’t even handle Shambala died after a few moments.

‘Phew, now we’ve dealt with the priests and magicians to some extent.’

Ark panted as he ran out of breath and looked around. While Ark had used various schemes to shave down the power of Jewel’s group, once the battle started it had tilted to Jewel’s favour as expected. Those strategies couldn’t overcome the 100 level difference. But despite the overwhelming disadvantage, the users’ formation hadn’t collapsed yet. The first reason for that was the power of the broadcast. The fight would be broadcast in real time. Therefore the users showed enormous concentration in battle in order to improve their appearance. In order to increase the atmosphere, they were willing to drink potions like water. And the second reason was because of Ark and Shambala who intruded right into the enemy camp. In fact, it wasn’t the warriors but the magicians and priests that controlled a battlefield. It was because of the wide area magic of a magician and the support magic from the priests! In New World, these two occupations had the most influence on a group battle. So Ark infiltrated the enemy camp to assassinate the magicians and priests. He was level 383. With the dark attribute bonus he was level 574 so he didn’t hesitate to jump into enemy lines where hundreds of people swarmed. But even if he was over level 400, it would still be difficult alone. However, Ark wasn’t alone.

‘It really does feel different whenever I fight with this guy.’

Ark looked at Shambala after killing the secret society members. Ark had fought in wars with thousands of people and also hunted with various professions. But he only felt this comfortable feeling while

fighting with Shambala. When paired with Shambala, they didn't need to speak at all. Most times Shambala had already moved before Ark could even speak a word. And Ark also knew where to move to help Shambala just by watching. It was thanks to the sense of solidarity gained from fighting together in the Evil Silrion and in the Seutandal conquest war.

'It is also the same with Shambala.....!'

Then Shambala who had been observing the war situation pointed to one side and shouted.

"Ark, this time it is over there!"

Shambala was pointing towards the left side of Lancel's defense formation. Jewel realized that the users' resistance was more stubborn than he thought and concentrated the secret society members in one place to try and breakthrough. Thus the users who were maintaining that spot immediately started to die.

"We have to hurry. In that state they won't be able to hold it!"

"Understood, wait a minute!"

Ark nodded and started feeling around in the mud on the ground. Then he picked something up from where the elemental shaman had died.

-Elemental Shaman's Gloves (Magic)

Armour type: Cloth Gloves

Defense: 26

Durability: 150/150

Weight: 30

User Restriction: Level 180, Elemental Shaman exclusive use.

A pair of luxury magic gloves created using silk woven from fairies.

Thanks to the magic of the fairies, the affinities of the Elemental Shaman will increase.

<Option: Intelligence +20, Elemental Shaman's magic attacks +5%>

'Huhuhu, I got another one!'

Ark looked warmly at the information window. That was another reason why Ark broke into enemy lines. In New World, users who were a part of the NPC faction during the war wouldn't become chaotic if they murdered the opponents. Meanwhile, the users who attacked the NPC village were chaotic. And when a chaotic player died, they always dropped one equipment. However this was a very important point.

'The chaotic players also know that they will drop an equipment if they die. And it is impossible to think there isn't a slight chance of dying in a battlefield.'

Therefore Jewel's group mostly wore cheap equipment. The level difference was so big that they thought cheap equipment would be sufficient. On the other hand, the Lancel defenders weren't chaotic so their chances of dropping equipment were very low except when a scroll was used on them. There was also the insurance so they felt comfortable wearing magic equipment. That was another reason why the Lancel defenders were able to endure the attacks.

'But the rear support like magicians and priests has a low chance of dying so they are far more likely to be wearing magic items!'

Thus Ark risked danger and plunged into enemy lines to dispose of the magicians and priests because of this reason. Compared to the others, their chances of dropping good equipment were much higher. And the result was a bingo. 70% of them had dropped magic items. Thanks to that, Ark's bag was already filled with 30 magic items.

"Is gaining items your only thought in a situation like this?"

Shambala who was standing next to Ark muttered under his breath. Ark replied with a grin.

“You wouldn’t do it. That’s why we have good chemistry.”

“Don’t talk nonsense. Hurry up and collect the items!”

“Okay, let’s go!”

Ark and Shambala rushed over to the defensive line. The situation was more serious than he thought. When Jewel and Duke led the secret society members directly, the users under fire couldn’t even last 1 minute. While Ark had placed a lot of users in the defensive line, there were only 40~50 users remaining who were in a critical condition.

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

Razak was also trying to maintain the defense formation using Iron Fire Wall. But even more of Jewel’s group struck him and he collapsed like a sandcastle.

“Ark, it has begun! Heavy Rain Sword!”

Shambala dived towards the place where Jewel’s group was crowded and used his skill. Hundreds of daggers emerged from the darkness and dealt considerable damage.

“It’s my turn now. Flash!”

Ark followed up with his wide area skill Flash. It was Ark and Shambala’s wide area skill combo. The secret society members who were attacking the defense formation received extravagant damage and stumbled.

“It is Dark Wolf and Blue Sword!”

The users cheered as Ark and Shambala appeared. The secret society members were just puzzled. Then Jewel who had been commanding them from the rear shouted.

“K-kill them! Your target has been changed to those guys!”

Jewel yelled while withdrawing and using long distance attacks. While he had a high amount of pride, he could admit that he wouldn't win with frontal attacks. Thus Jewel avoided engaging with Ark and commanded the secret society members to. Anyway, they flocked like vultures at Jewel's command. Meanwhile, the archers simultaneously started to pull their bows while the magicians started chanting spells. Then Shambala saw Ark and shouted.

“Ark!”

“I know. It is close.....aha, here it is!”

Ark had been looking around for a short time before laughing and striking the ground. Then a mechanical sound was heard and poison arrows flew towards the magicians. But that wasn't the end. Every time Ark struck the ground an explosion of arrows would occur and strike the opponents.

“T-this is.....heok!”

Jewel who had been chanting a spell also stumbled as a poison arrow hit him. Then Ark smirked and looked like he was muttering a soliloquy.

“Stupid bastards, you shouldn't have plunged into enemy territory without some countermeasures. Furthermore, did you really think I would not build some defences against you?”

Sometimes being the one attacked was more advantageous than attacking. The strong point was that they knew the place being attacked so they could make preparations. Ark took advantage of that and laid some traps operated by a switch. When the traps didn't activate while the assaulters were charging, Jewel's group assumed that there were only holes and no traps. The traps also didn't activate in the midst of the confused fighting.

“Y-you really.....kill! Kill him!”

“Not a chance!”

Ark triggered another hidden switch and smoke appeared. A smoke trap! The visions of the secret society members were suddenly trapped so they hesitated. At the same time, Ark and Shambala ran up to them. And unleashed a feast of spectacular attacks!

“Petrification of Blood!

“Dark blade!”

Pepepepeng, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

It was the cooperative technique of Ark and Shambala. Shambala’s Petrification of Blood turned the warriors into stone. They couldn’t move or attack but their defense also increased by 500%. However, Ark’s Dark Blade ignored all defense so that didn’t matter. The warriors turned to stone could only glare as their petrification loosened the moment they died. It was a basic coordinated technique. Shambala created a gap in the enemy’s attack while Ark took advantage of it to deal critical hits. And when Ark’s kicks caused an enemy to stiffen, Shambala’s dagger would be driven into their stomach! It was a harmony so perfect there was no room for even a needle to enter! But that wasn’t all of Ark’s weapons.

“There are four archers 10 metres to the right!”

Ark shouted as the archers prepared to use ‘Precision Fire.’ Then the raccoons emerged from a hole and fired cannons at them. Yes, the holes of the raccoons weren’t just to prevent the assaulters’ charge. The raccoons would move along the underground passage for strategic firing of their cannons.

“Damn, those stupid raccoons again!”

The secret society members exclaimed angrily before swinging their swords at the raccoons. However, the raccoons disappeared into the hole like the moles in the ‘Whack-a-mole’ game. And they instantly emerged from another hole to fire their cannons. There was also the

possibility of the opponents entering the hole. But how could ordinary users deal with the inhabitants of the Underground World inside their tunnels? If they plunged into the hole then they would just die in vain like the assaulters. It was the method of using switch operated traps and the raccoons! Meanwhile, Ark and Shambala were dealing with 40 members of the secret society. Ark didn't care about his health and mana and just continued firing his skills. It was because of the Vampire Stone and Mana Steal Stone inserted into the Promised Sword. Just like with Bread, the Hearthstones couldn't display a huge effect against one opponent. However, this was a situation with many opponents. He could steal the health and mana of dozens of users in one go! The Explosion stone also wrecked some havoc. The effect caused splash damage to all surrounding enemies.

"Ooooooh....."

"Is that really Dark Wolf and Blue Sword fighting?"

"That....no way. No matter how strong they are, it's still two people against a lot of opponents....."

The users forgot they were in a battle and just idly watched the two of them fighting. If this scene was broadcasted then it was normal to think the opponents were weak. But the users had been beaten to a critical condition just now by the secret society members. It wasn't possible to think of them as weak. Then the answer was that Ark and Shambala were too strong! No, there was no need to compare them. It was a fight which transcended the imagination of a general user! The standards that Ark and Shambala showed couldn't be simply compared anymore.

"I can't just stand by after watching this!"

"We have to help Dark Wolf and Blue Sword defeat the villains!"

"Wah ah ah ah!"

The users' spirits were ignited and they pushed back onto the battlefield. Despite Ark and Shambala's actions, Jewel's group still had the upper hand in power. However, the users' morale doubled which

increased their power when they attacked Jewel's group. On the other hand, the secret society members had their morale fall to the bottom and couldn't counterattack properly.

'That's it, the urgent fire has been put out.'

Ark instantly checked the 15 split screens floating. The reason Ark sent the video to the broadcasting station directly wasn't just for the sake of a lucrative video. By using the 15 cameras installed, he could fully grasp the entire battlefield. By looking at the split windows, he could see that it was still disadvantageous to the Lancel defenders. While Ark and Shambala moved quickly and conquered the crisis, dozens of users on the other side of the defensive wall were falling down. Yet Ark and Shambala couldn't leave here to go support the situation!

'.....It's not possible.'

"Racard, commence the operation. Point A on the right."

"Chik.....chik.....understood. I'm going."

When Ark communicated wirelessly, Racard used satellite surveillance mode and flew down through the heavy rain. And he glided over the heads of Jewel's group that were his target.

"I've arrived in the mission area. Over!"

"Okay, commence the operation!"

"Yes!"

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Then Radun who had been clinging onto Racard opened his mouth. The sphere bombs used in the illusionary Lancel village emerged from Radun's mouth and fell. That was the reason why he previously only used half of the Fire Stones.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

When Radun hanging onto Racard dropped the bombs, the area was filled with fire. It was using a flying monster to bomb from the air! Ark who had been watching the screens saw the secret society members receive the bomb baptism. Unlike the explosion in the fake Lancel, this time the bombs 100% hit. The result was fatal! The secret society members received a blow which nearly destroyed them.

“Ohh, now! Attack!”

The users who regained their moral started attacking the secret society members. But Racard’s and Radun’s part hadn’t ended yet.

“Radun, you did well. Return to the scheduled point to finish your job!”

Racard fly down low and dropped Radun off. Radun crawled along the battlefield at a tremendous speed and flicked his tongue around. Then the users on the battlefield started to become confused.

“Eh? The chaotic users have been killed but why haven’t any equipment dropped? Has someone already collected it?”

Yes, this was Radun’s mission after being dropped into the battlefield. Lots of secret society members died from the bombs and the users’ counterattack. Of course there would be a large amount of equipment which fell. Radun’s mission was to plunge into the battlefield and collect the items. Of course, this operation was risky. It wasn’t unusual for Radun to go around a battlefield by himself. But this time they were users. They were different from stupid monsters. They were likely to be suspicious of snakes wandering the battlefield.

‘But he won’t be found in this confused fighting.’

The reason Ark was sure about this was because of Radun’s new skill.

-Radun has manifested an ability of the Alamone.

The Alamone is a mysterious species of snake living in the Netherworld. However, treasure hunters have attacked it thanks to its ability to swallow japtem and they are currently in the state of extinction. Thanks

to that unfortunate history, the Alamone has developed the long overdue ability to hide themselves. The last Alamone Radun has realized that power after a lot of experience.

* Protective Colouration (Beginner, Racial Special Quality): Radun can assimilate his skin to the colour of the surrounding environment and decrease the probability of being found. With Beginner's Protective Colouration, 60% assimilation to the surrounding environment will be applied. But the effect of the assimilation will rise when the enemy's range of vision is restriction such as at night time or in bad weather.

<60% assimilation with the surrounding environment. 5 mana will be consumed every 10 seconds when moving>

Since Radun often collected loot alone, he had manifested the Alamone's ability to hide. If it was daytime then it was difficult for Radun's Protective Colouration to completely hide himself. But right now the battlefield had the three conditions 'night', 'mud' and 'heavy rain!' His assimilation rate had reached 90%. So Radun was completely assimilated and he ran around licking his tongue.

-Radun has acquired the 'Steel Metal Shield.'

-Radun has acquired the 'Nameless Bow.'

-Radun has acquired the 'Silky Sword'.....

'Hahaha! Okay, okay. Eat away!'

Ark had no time to rest as new information windows continued popping up. They were just general equipment but the number of them was truly a jackpot.

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun swept up the equipment and returned to the safety zone after completing his mission. Then Racard flew towards Radun and grabbed him.

“The Airborne division has completed the collection and is awaiting the next instructions. Over!”

“The next mission area is 30 metres ahead of you.”

“Okay, I’ll begin bombing preparations!”

Flames followed him when Racard flew over in the night sky.

‘Okay, those operations are going as planned. Now all that’s left is.....’

Ark paid attention to the split screen and checked the military situation. The military situation wasn’t that good when he checked it. The defensive line had barely held up thanks to Ark and Shambala’s efforts but there were already 250 users dead. And the remaining 150 users only had around 10~30% health left. On the other hand, Jewel’s group still had 350 people left. It was overwhelming power.

‘But the results are proceeding as planned.’

In fact, Ark had intended for there to be a lot of Jewel’s group left alive. Usually the commanders in a battle used the direct strategy. The most common one was to focus the attacks on reducing the enemy numbers. However Ark didn’t use this method. Rather than reducing the numbers, he concentrated on shaving away the enemy’s health. Despite the damage the users did, from Ark’s view they were just an inevitable sacrifice. The average health of the secret society was 30~40%. 250 users had sacrificed their lives for that.

‘And now is the time!’

Ark judged it was time and threw firecrackers in the air. Then several flashes appeared in the night sky. It was at that time. The forest started shaking and there were thundering shouts.

“Wah ah ah ah!”

The people who rushed into the battlefield were from the beast clans. They were the real troops of Lancel village, the Wolrang and the

Meow. Yes, Ark hadn't used the Wolrang and Meow even when the defensive line was in a crisis. The Wolrang were around level 300 while the Meow were around level 200. If they had fought from the beginning then the situation might be easier now. However, Ark's purpose wasn't simply to protect Lancel village. It was to minimize the damage on the NPCs. After using the users to decrease the health of the secret society, he made the beast clans appear. Thanks to that, their health and mana was still 100%. They were also full of willpower. On the other hand, the health of the secret society members went all the way down to 30~40% after a long battle.

"Grrrrr, this is our home!"

"Nyaaaaa, angry cat punch!"

"Bark bark bark bark!"

"Nyang nyang nyang nyang nyang!"

The beast clans swarmed around the secret society members with low health. But the thing that surprised Jewel wasn't the beast clans. It was the pair among the beast clans firing magic and swinging a greatsword. They were Bread and Redian! Yes, the pair who had intruded on the battlefield was Bread and Redian who were Bristania's strongest duo.

"Uh, why is hyung-nim and noonim.....?"

Jewel stuttered with an incredibly confused expression. Bread and Redian snorted as they started at Jewel.

"Shut up. Anybody who attacks a dog is my enemy!"

"Those who push a cat are my enemy!"

"Dog? Cat? What are you.....? No, are hyung-nim and noonim really going to become enemies with the Hermes alliance?"

"The Hermes alliance? Oh, haven't you withdrawn from the alliance?"

"Eh?"

Jewel flinched and shut his mouth. Then Bread laughed and slammed his greatsword into the ground.

“Heh, I don’t care what you guys do. And I have no memory of us being friend in the first place. I won’t leave it alone if I see animal cruelty in front of me! If you’re dissatisfied then attack. I’ll prevent you from doing wicked things in front of me!”

“T-these bastards....! Stop them! Smash those cats and dogs!”

“Wah ah ah ah!”

The secret society raised their weapons and ran up.

“I won’t let you bother the dogs in front of me. Earth Storm!”

Bread used various Beast Spirit Possessions and swung his greatsword. Bread who had reached level 410 and had the 50% bonus had swung his greatsword! An absurd gust of wind blew out and the secret society members were thrown like autumn leaves. It was also the same situation with the Meow.

“Bah, you’ve become thieves? Furthermore, you dare disturb the peaceful town where cats live. Despite being a pervert, Bread is 100 times better than you! I’ll get rid of that rotten spirit. High speed incantation, highest magic unsealed! The unquenchable flame burning in the bottom of hell! Under the name of the Elemental Master Redian, descend to this land. Volcano of Hell!”

After Redian finished chanted the spell an enormous magic circle formed. Then the magic circle started to shake like an earthquake was occurring and the earth split because lava rose up. But Redian’s magic didn’t end there. Redian then used the chain skill ‘Lava Rain,’ causing the lava to form into fireballs which were hurled. It was the highest ranking magic of a level 400 elemental magician. The fire magic that Jewel used was no comparison.

‘Indeed.....I can be relieved about the beast clan if I leave it to them two!’

That was the reason why Ark left the Wolrang and Meow to Bread and Redian. If the Wolrang and Meow were in danger then Bread and Redian would do everything to protect them. Instead of being in danger, the beast clans would be protected by them.

“What’s this? You dare touch a dog in front of me? Do you hate living?”

Whenever the Wolrang was hit, Bread would show his teeth and growl. And the secret society members collapsed under his greatsword.

‘Now the military situation is in our favour. As I expected.....’

Ark looked at the split screens for a while. Then the scene of Jewel, Duke and several high level members moving caught his eye. Ark immediately grasped the situation from their movement. He turned to Shambala who also seemed to grasp the situation and nodded. The two exchanged glances before Ark and Shambala split up at a quick pace. Then just as Jewel was trying to use a skill.....Ark used a scroll on Duke who was using the same skill as Jewel from a distant place.

“[Magnetism]!”

Ark pulled Duke with [Magnetism] while Sprinting towards Jewel.

“Huk! What, what the?”

Duke became confused as he was dragged by a strong, magnetic force. But the person even more confused was Jewel.

“T-this, Ark? Ah! N-no!”

Then Duke was dragged next to Jewel. Something suddenly rose from the ground before disappearing. It was the Area Declaration that a player who changed to their 2nd stage profession could use. When Ark used Eyes of the Cat, he identified that Jewel, Duke and two members of the secret society had changed professions. If the situation became disadvantageous then they would definitely use the Area Declaration skill.

Of course, Ark and Shambala could also use the Area Declaration

skill. But if they did that then Ark and Shambala's area declaration would also disappear. So he came up with the idea to make their collide using [Magnetism]. But the range of [Magnetism] was only dozens of metres. On the other hand, the range of Area Declaration was 100 metres. That's why he used [Magnetism] before using Sprint to pull Duke as much as possible. Shambala who had run to the opposite direction also did the same thing to the two members of the secret society to seal off their Area Declarations. Thus their Area Declarations was used in vain.

"You, you bastard.....!"

Jewel glared at Ark.

"What will glaring at me do?"

"What?"

"Did you think you were the only one to change to the 2nd profession?"

Ark muttered and laughed.

"Oh, I can finally use it! Land of the Beast!"

Bread plunged his greatsword into the ground and shouted. Then a giant totem popped out of the earth and a blue area spread around him. At the same time, Bread was covered in a golden fur and the muscles on his body became many times larger. Bread was also flanked by two semitransparent wolves. The Beast Master had used his Area Declaration skill Land of the Beast. Attack and defense +50%! While within the territory of Area Declaration, the summoned spirit of the wolves can attack the enemies but won't deal any physical damage.

"Go, souls of the brave wolves!"

Awooooo! The souls of the wolves flew forward like an arrow at Bread's command and surrounded the secret society members. The secret society members trapped by the spirit wolves died as the greatsword attacked them.

"Bah, I can't let you have all the fun alone. Land of Fire and Ice!"

Redian also used her Area Declaration skill on the left hand side. Then cubes of fire and ice appeared within the 100 metre area. Magic attack +50% and additional 500 fire and ice damage! Once within the area of fire and ice, the opponents will continuously receive fire and ice damage. It was the Area Declarations of the level 400 Bread and Redian. The level 250~300 secret society members within the Area Declaration were no match.

“A-avoid it!”

“Run away. The effects of Area Declaration will only work within that territory!”

The secret society members screamed and retreated. But behind them were Ark and Shambala.

“Don’t they seem overconfident? I feel like I’m being treated as weak because of my style of attack. It can’t be helped. Area Declaration, River of Blood!”

The ground around Shambala started becoming muddy and changed into a river of blood. It increased attack and defense by 50% whole increase the damage of backstab by 200%. When the retreating secret society members ran into Shambala’s territory, one hit instantly reduced their health by 10%.

“Now it’s been decided.”

Ark muttered as he saw the three Area Declarations used on the battlefield. The secret society members were surrounded by the beast clans so there was no way to escape. The ensuring siege thrust them back into Bread, Redian and Shambala’s Area Declarations.

“Now, is it my turn?”

In order to obtain victory, Ark decided to use the Area Declarations at the end. Sweat dripped down Jewel’s face before he suddenly shouted.

“Damn, I can’t fail like this! Suicide squad, use your last resort! Charge into Lancel and blow up the magic tower and Ark’s store! For the glory of the suicide squad!”

“What? Suicide squad?”

Ark flinched and turned his head. The looks on dozens of secret society faces completely changed. Then they suddenly pulled out something like a wick and stuck it to their heads. Then the wick started burning at an incredible speed. The suicide squad members with the wicks on their heads rushed towards the defensive line with determined expressions.

“I’ll go first!”

“For the glory of the Lord! Waaaaaah!”

Kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The suicide squad member collided with the users and a huge explosion occurred, sending dozens of people flying away. The explosive power couldn’t even be compared to the Fire Stone bombs. It was the suicide squad’s weapon ‘Self-destruct’ which caused enormous havoc. The defensive line quickly collapsed from the suicide squad members exploding. Thus the suicide squad penetrated the defensive line and entered Lancel village.

“Stop them, block those guys!”

Ark hurriedly screamed. Then the raccoons pulled the suicide squad members into the hole. However, that was a mistake. When the suicide squad members in the hole exploded, the damage was even worse. The underground passages were connected like a spider web in the ground underneath Lancel. When the ground collapsed from the explosion belowground, many buildings were destroyed. Not to mention the raccoons hidden in the ground. Meanwhile the suicide squad members had entered the village and exploded near some buildings.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

A red warning message floated in front of Ark.

-Lancel village has received a serious blow!

<NPC- 12%, Structure- 17%>

‘Oh my god!’

Sweat started dripping down Ark’s back. He was careless while planning his strategies. He never expected them to blow themselves up. Anyway, the serious was serious now that the suicide squad members had penetrated the village. Even if they won the battle, he would fail the quest if 30% of the NPCs and structures were destroyed! Besides, their number 1 goal was Ark’s store. If Ark’s store exploded then Ark’s entire fortune would be turned to ash.

“Hahahaha, let’s die together!”

Jewel said as he glared at Ark. In fact, there was a reason Jewel hadn’t used the suicide squads until then. Self-destruct caused enormous havoc but it also had a huge penalty on the ones who used it. The Self-destruct used by the suicide squads was different from the ones magicians used. Since an enormous chaotic value was required to learn it, those who used it received 5 times the death penalty. In other words, all of their stats would be -5 and they couldn’t resurrect for 5 days. Also the durability of their equipment would be reduced by 80%. If they used it when their equipment had lost 20% of its durability then all the equipment would break. But now they had no choice. They didn’t mind dying as long as they achieved some of their goals. That was the decision the suicide squad made.

Kwa kwa kwa kwang, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

Meanwhile, a few buildings had once again collapsed. And they were heading towards Ark’s store. At that time, a barrier rose from the ground and blocked the suicide squad. It was the barrier that the raccoons had installed! But even such a barrier was destroyed in one shot by Self-destruct. If the suicide squad rushed again then Ark’s store would be smashed to pieces.

‘No. I have to do whatever it takes to stop them!’

The cornered Ark turned his eyes to the users. Then a solution came to his head. If they want to use the suicide squad then we will also use a suicide squad. Those guys had about 10 seconds before exploding once they placed the wick. The users had 10 seconds to grab their ankles. The question was whether the users would be willing to die along with the suicide squad members. If a person was damaged by Self-destruct then the durability of their equipment would also fall by 50%. The users had been in a long battle so their equipment had already fallen by 50%! If they got caught by Self-destruct then their equipment would be destroyed! But Ark had a plan for convince the users.

“Stop them! The contract was only for equipment stolen by those guys. But if your equipment is destroyed like this then the insurance money will still be paid!”

Yes, most of the users had signed up for ‘Ark’s Compensation Insurance!’ While the original contract was just for equipment stolen by the scrolls, Ark declared that he would pay the insurance for equipment broken by Self-destruct. It was a 200% payout! Of course, Ark would receive damage if most of the users’ equipment was destroyed but he had no time to think about such a thing.

“In addition, if you block the suicide squad then it is possible to be the hero who saved Lancel! But the insurance will only be paid to the first one who caught the suicide squad members. If many people stick to one fellow then the insurance money won’t be paid!”

Ark meticulously controlled the terms of the contract even in this situation. Anyway, the users’ eyes lit up at Ark’s words.

“What? I’ll get insurance money if my equipment is broken?”

“I can be the hero who saved Lancel village!”

“Oh, I can get money and fame at the same time!”

“I, I’ll go and stop them!”

Thanks to the thought of money and fame, the users agreed to sacrifice their bodies. Then they swarmed and stuck to the bodies of the suicide squad. The suicide squad members were pulled down and covered with the users' body..... In the end, the users and the suicide squad members both died together from the explosion.

-Lancel village has received a serious blow!

<NPC- 13%, Structure- 23%>

'That was close but I managed to block it.'

Ark sighed with relief as he looked at the information window. But now he had to pay the insurance claim to the users who interrupted the suicide squad. If they had insurance then he would have to pay 200% of the items they insured.

'This is because of that guy!'

Ark grinded his teeth together and approached Jewel. The shabby looking Jewel was pale white and discouraged. The plan to loot Lancel village was thwarted. The strategy of dying together had also failed. More than half of the remaining members had died within Bread, Redian and Shambala's Area Declarations Jewel who had risked his life on this strategy felt all the spirit escape him.

"T-this isn't reality..... Yes, it is a dream..... Huhuhu, I'm just dreaming and the raid hasn't happened yet..... It's a dream..... Just a dream....."

Then a black aura suddenly appeared under Jewel's foot. Jewel winced and turned his head where a black object was floating. It was Ark's Area Declaration, Glory of the Night. But that wasn't all of it.

"Descent of the Fire Draconian!"

Ark shouted and a fire pillar rose from the earth. The flames then turned into a giant scale. The flames formed a Fire Draconian which ascended the sky before falling like a lightning bolt to hit Ark's body. It was a

huge fire storm. When the flames appeared, the water on the ground quickly became water vapour.

“Kuaaaaak!”

Jewel looked through the flames and water vapour with bemused eyes. The person standing in front of him was Ark with the power of the Fire Draconian swirling around him.

-You have used the Divine Skill Descent of the Fire Draconian!

The effect of <Immortal Fire Draconian> will be applied for 10 minutes.

* 300 Fire damage added to all attacks.

* Attack speed, Movement speed and Reaction rate will increase by 50%.

* All enemies that attack will receive 10~100 fire damage.

* Fire resistance increases to 500% and all party members' fire resistance will increase to 100%.

* When activated, all enemies within the area will receive 1000 fire damage while 50% of the user's health will be restored.

“Now, how should I kill you?”

Ark stared at Jewel with cold eyes and muttered. Then Ark started moving at an incredible pace. Every time Ark moved, fire will appear in the ground behind him. There were continuous ringing sounds and the secret society members went flying away. The users just looked at the scene with dumb surprise. While not a lot of users had a 2nd profession, it could sometimes be seen. So Area Declarations were sometimes seen on TV but this was the first time they had seen a Divine skill used. Anyway, the Divine skill had overwhelming power! Jewel also couldn't run away since Ark's territory was surrounded by Shambala, Bread and Jewel's. Furthermore, several beasts and users were surrounding the outside so there was no place to escape. However Ark, Shambala, Bread and Redian only decreased their health to 1~2%. There

was a reason why Ark commanded the users not to kill the secret society members. That's right.....

"Now's the time!

100 people ran out of Lancel at Ark's shout. It was the guards of Lancel village which consisted of the ex-thieves! Yes, the reason why Ark didn't kill the secret society members was because of this. If they died by the users or beasts then they could just revive in 24 hours. Then they could come back and attack Lancel. However, they would be stuck in prison if the guards killed them. Since they had become chaotic from attacking NPC villages, they would be stuck in jail for a long time. Thus Ark had left the guards until the end.

"Heok! G-guards!"

"K-kill! Kill them now!"

Jewel was in a complete state of panic as the guards appeared. Some of the secret society members even grabbed their colleagues and asked them to kill each other. However it was already too late. They only had 1~2% health left. Despite the level difference, the level 200 guards could kill them with one or two strokes. Jewel's group instantly collapsed as the guards advanced. After 5 minutes, Jewel and the secret society members had collapsed. At the same time Shambhala, Bread and Redian released their skill. Ark's Area Declaration was the only one remaining with a huge dragon floating in the centre of the battlefield. Ark looked at Jewel's corpse before raising his fist and shouting.

"A victory for justice!"

The users also shouted along.

"W-we won!"

"I did it! Now we're heroes!"

"We defeated the 500 thieves!"

“Oh, hooray for the Lancel defenders! Hooray for Dark Wolf!”

“It was a pleasure to fight under Dark Wolf! He’s unbeatable!”

The users who survived after an intense battle jumped wildly and cheered. However, the cheering users didn’t realize something. There was a reason why Ark was inciting the cheers despite disliking attention. While the users’ gazes were focused on him, they were unaware of what was going on under their feet. Radun was secretly crawling and gathering equipment under their feet.

The rain and wind gradually stopped. Dawn was breaking after a long night.

Act 6: Game Exclusive News

“Dammit!”

Ha Myung-woo opened the door and entered the office violently.

“How are you managing the candidates?”

Ha Myung-woo shouted and threw the document onto the desk. The reason was the video of Lancel village broadcasted yesterday morning. No, the video itself wasn’t a problem. The important thing was that the main character Ark was one of Global Exos candidates. It was a problem because he was one of the special management targets. Once again, the reason for the examination was for the Planning Department of Global Exos to find the master code. However, so far the Planning Department had no idea of where the master code could be found.

‘According to the information, the master code should be closely related to the scenario of New World.’

New World was a game with infinite degrees of freedom. But even certain scenarios existed in New World. And the scenarios proceeded

according to the users' growth. If the users grew quickly then the scenario would progress quickly and if growth was slow then the scenario would also slow down.

'By hiding the master code in the scenarios, Park Woo-seong left a challenge for gamers. The master code is unable to be found using luck and chance. Park Woo-seong made it clear that the master code could only be found after several checkpoints are passed.'

As the main designer of the game, Park Woo-seong had designed those checkpoints to be within the scenarios. Therefore over the last 2 years the Planning Department had been reviewing reports and videos from the candidates and looking at their quests and how it might relate to future scenarios. And it was very important to manage this information. The master code being hidden in New World meant that users could get their hands on it. If information about the master code flowed into the hands of a user who wasn't a candidate then Global Exos would be in an unbearable situation.

"The master code is a program which controls everything in New World. If the person with the master code wanted then they could delete thousands of users' information at once or they could deliberately cause system errors which would paralyze the whole game."

That was what one of the game developers said. If such a thing happened then Global Exos would be damaged by several billion won. But that was only a part of what the master code could do. There was an even worst situation.

"The New World system connects directly to the brain. If there is a serious bug which affects the system then that bug could impact the users' brain. In the worst case scenario, the user would suffer serious brain damage."

Yes, that was the situation they were most concerned about. Such dangers always existed since virtual reality connected to the brain. Therefore all virtual reality games had safety equipment which double and triple checked safety New World was the same. The problem was

that the master code could even control the safety equipment. If a person with the master code unlocked the safety device and restarted the system then hundreds of terabyte information would flood into the users' brains. It was a tremendous amount of information beyond the limits of the brain! Users who received such a bomb of information might become brain dead. Then what would happen if a user who didn't know about the master code obtained it? In the worst case scenario, they would have to discontinue New World and lose the billions invested in it. Yes, obtaining the master code was like a life or death situation for Global Exos.

'Even if we have to use hundreds or thousands of personnel, we have to find it!'

But keeping this information secret was just as important. If any of the other rival companies knew about the master code then the situation would get out of hand. The second problem was if a rival company obtained the master code. If the competitors knew the truth about the master code and the risks to users, Global Exos would receive a lot of criticism for commercializing New World anyway. Therefore it was more important to hide the information that they were looking for the master code. So the staff decided to use the candidates.

'We can freely obtain information about the game through the candidates.'

Ha Myung-woo also often turned on the broadcast at night to monitor news. Fortunately, the war between users in the mountain village would cause no big problems. But if any information about the master code had been in that video then it would've been a huge problem. As the manager, he couldn't just let it pass!

'Of all things, a video of one of the special management targets.....!'

"Where is Ho Myung-hwan? Bring him here right now!"

Ha Myung-woo shouted angrily. At the same time, Ho Myung-hwan ran into the Planning Department and shouted.

"T-Team Chief-nim, it is huge!"

"Huge? What could be bigger than this problem?"

"Huh? That's.....no, please look at this data. The Public Relations Department called this morning and showed me this. It is truly a jackpot!"

Ho Myung-hwan explained in an excited voice.

--

"What the, this is?"

When he woke up in the morning, he had become a big star. He never imagined that it would become like this. After arriving in Lancel and participating in the defensive war, Hyun-woo had felt a huge sense of burden. This war was different from other situations. Depending on the outcome, two years of hard work and sweat could fly away. The stolen goods, the real estate invested in Lancel village and the goods from Ark's store. The estimated amount was tens of thousands of gold. Tens of thousands of gold..... When converted to money it was a huge price which reached hundreds of millions of won! It was an extravagant amount that people would kill over. Such a huge amount could fly away in one moment from the war. Therefore Hyun-woo couldn't get any rest during the last two days. He wasn't able to sleep. Although it was inside the game, Hyun-woo also had his life at stake.

'If I was defeated then I would really die of a heart attack.....'

But luckily the war ended with Hyun-woo's victory. He had risked his life and protected his assets. All the tension within Hyun-woo had been cut and he had fallen asleep and only just woke up. Then he logged into the computer without really thinking about it and his mouth opened absentmindedly.

-I really was thrilled!

-He was silent for a while after Seutandal rose but this really was a tremendous job.

-As expected from Dark Wolf. Dark Wolf really is the hero of New World!

-Dark Wolf, Dark Wolf, Dark Wolf!

Hyun-woo had logged into the auction site to examine the market prices. New world's homepage. The various bulletin board and information sites were all talking about Dark Wolf. That wasn't all. While it was rare for a non-celebrity to reach the top 10 in search rankings on portal sites, the Dark Wolf fan club had reached 3~4 in the search rankings. It reached the extent that there were even fan clubs from foreign countries.

'What's going on?'

Hyun-woo looked at the monitor filled with the name Dark Wolf with a stupid expression. Of course Hyun-woo had expected quite a bit of interest after broadcasting the Lancel defensive war. He hadn't really been thinking about that when negotiating with the station. However, the actual reaction was a dozen times more than Hyun-woo expected. Hyun-woo looked at the monitor with a frozen expression. Hyun-woo was someone who stayed in all day playing the game. Then one day there was an explosion of interest in Hyun-woo, no in Dark Wolf from Korea and the world. He honestly didn't know how he felt about it.

Diririri.

The phone then rang while Hyun-woo was making a stupid expression.

"Hello?"

"Is this Dark Wolf-nim?"

"Huh? Yes, but why?"

"I am the game exclusive news reported you called the other day, Lee Yun-gyu."

"Ah! Reporter-nim, why are you.....?"

Hyun-woo was still in a state of shock after just waking up so he spoke in a slurred tone. Then Lee Yun-gyu hesitated before explaining.

"That's.....no, I can't tell you over the phone. It involves a copyright problem with the video so can you come to the broadcasting station right away? Just tell the guards that you're Dark Wolf."

Since Lee Yun-gyu sounded a little weird, Hyun-woo hurried over there. When he arrived at the broadcasting station, a man quickly ran out.

"Ah, welcome. Are you Dark Wolf-nim? I'm Lee Yun-gyu.'

"Yes, hello?" But why do you need me this morning? What's the matter?"

"Problem?" There is one. A very huge problem."

"A huge problem?"

"I can't talk about it here so please enter for the moment. The Team Chief is also waiting."

Lee Yun-gyu guided Hyun-woo into the broadcasting station. When he arrived at the meeting room, a middle-aged man was waiting. He was the team chief in charge of the game exclusive news segment. Hyun-woo greeted the Team Chief and sat down. Once he sat down, the Team Chief laughed and said.

"Have you connected to the internet today?"

"Huh? Ah, yes....."

"That is why we wanted to meet you today."

"Because of that?"

When Hyun-woo tilted his head with confusion, both Lee Yun-gyu and the Team Chief laughed. Then their eyes landed on Hyun-woo and they paused before speaking.

"The results came in this morning. It is the audience ratings for the Lancel defensive war broadcasted yesterday. Do you know how much the audience rating was? 35%! Surprisingly it was 35%! When the broadcast started it was on 7% but the ratings had gone up to 35% before it finished!"

".....So?"

Hyun-woo scratched his head and muttered. Of course, even Hyun-woo who never watched dramas knew that 35% viewership was a significant amount. But he wasn't a celebrity so audience ratings had no effect on him. And why were they suddenly talking about audience viewership?

"This is the best audience rating since the game exclusive news started. And it's the first time the ratings had jumped from 7% to 35%."

".....What is your point?"

Hyun-woo answered with an unimpressed voice. Then the Team Chief suddenly stood up and grasped Hyun-woo's hands.

"Let's sign a contract!"

"Huh?"

"Now all the users in the country who play New World.....no, there is nobody in New World who doesn't know about Dark Wolf. Our station's website and telephone line was paralyzed from calls wondering who Dark Wolf is. The audience's interest in you can't even compare with that of a celebrity. If Dark Wolf-nim appears on the broadcast then it will be a huge jackpot!"

'They brought me all the way to the broadcasting station just to say this?'

Hyun-woo sighed and shook his head.

"I'm thankful for the suggestion but I already said that I have no intention of appearing on the broadcast."

He didn't want his face to become well-known so he was unwilling to waste time with the broadcasting station. The station had contacted him many times but he had always refused. His answer was still the same, especially with the interest concentrated further on him. There was no reason for him to accept the offer. But the Team Chief also shook his head.

"No, the request isn't for you to appear on the broadcast."

"But you talked about a contract?"

"What I meant.....you explain it to him."

"Yes, in the past I wanted Dark Wolf-nim to appear on the broadcast directly but I realized I had the wrong idea after looking at the broadcaster's ratings."

Lee Yun-gyu explained to Hyun-woo.

"The wrong idea?"

"It will be fine if Dark Wolf-nim appears as Dark Wolf."

"What are you talking about?"

"In fact, our team had met up prior to this meeting. We were wondering why the video got such an absurd amount of interest. While there was already interest in the Lancel war thanks to the Crime File and Dark Wolf-nim battled well, we think the biggest role is Dark Wolf's mystery as an unidentified warrior."

"An unidentified warrior?"

"Yes, Dark Wolf-nim is a player who has only emerged four times. The Evil Silrion, the siege of Silvana, the Seutandal war and now this incident. The users have never seen Dark Wolf outside of those incidents."

It was natural. He only transformed during those times. Lee Yun-gyu smiled and continued talking.

“In fact, the audience was also interested in the users with you. But their interest in those users weakened quickly. Whenever you appear, the interest is only focused on Dark Wolf-nim. That’s because they don’t know anything about Dark Wolf-nim. In addition, the users never know what to expect when you appear in a video.”

Yes, the psychology of the interest in Hyun-woo was similar to that of a masked wrestler. The broadcasting station came to the conclusion that this was the reason for the huge ratings. So if Hyun-woo appeared on the broadcast then it would actually pour cold water on the viewers’ interest.

“But it is hard to give up the overwhelming interest of the viewers. So the game exclusive news planning department has organized a segment once a week which will show Dark Wolf’s gameplay. Since your face won’t be directly shown and it will be possible to maintain the interest in Dark Wolf, wouldn’t there be no burden on you?”

Hyun-woo felt refreshed by Lee Yun-gyu’s proposal. Certainly there was no reason for Hyun-woo to reject. The contract was no different from selling the ‘Netherworld exploration of a wicked wolf’ video. If Dark Wolf’s identity was concealed and the audience ratings increased then there was no need to worry about personal information leaking. Furthermore, he didn’t have to make a separate video. He was already sending all videos of his gameplay to Global Exos. The station only required a 10 minute video once a week so he just had to pick a decent video of Dark Wolf. It was a fixed income that would come in once a week. It was an unexpected chance!

‘But.....’

There was one problem in selling the video. Hyun-woo already had a contract with Global Exos to send his videos to them. According to that agreement, Global Exos had the rights to all the videos Ark took. That right also extended to whether the video could be broadcasted on TV>

He hadn't thought about that part when he had contacted the station about broadcasting the Lancel defensive war. It wasn't until this morning that he had worried about the contract. If Global Exos decided it was a breach of contract then it would be a serious problem.

'If I sign another contract then I'll be sued.'

Anyway, he couldn't blindly sign the station's contract.

"The offer is appreciated but I'll have to consult somewhere else before accepting."

Hyun-woo sighed and replied but Lee Yun-gyu just nodded and said.

"I'm aware of that. Is it because of Global Exos?"

"Huh? How do you know that?"

"In fact, we got a phone call this morning from the Planning Department of Global Exos. At first they called to protest about the video. That's why our contact with Dark Wolf-nim is so delayed."

'Of course.....!'

Hyun-woo felt his heart fall.

If the Planning Department of Global Exos called than the problem might be more serious than Hyun-woo thought. However, the words which followed were completely unexpected.

"But then we received another call a little while ago. They said it didn't matter if Dark Wolf's video is broadcasted. They also sent someone to discuss the problem....."

"Ark-nim!"

Then another man entered the meeting room and shouted. The person who called out was Ho Myung-hwan from Global Exos Planning Department.

"I tried to call your house but you were already heading to the broadcasting station."

Ho Myung-hwan wiped off his sweat as he ran in and took a seat. And he spoke with a mock-dissatisfied look.

"By the way, what nonsense is this? Shouldn't you have consulted with me before seeing the video to the broadcasting station? Do you know how much I got yelled at by the Team Chief?"

"That....."

"Well, it's fine. I'll talk about that problem later."

Ho Myung-hwan pulled out a few documents from his bag and said.

"I'm Ho Myung-hwan from Global Exos Planning Department. You already received a call about it in the morning but Global Exos owns the rights to Ark's videos. But after a brief meeting, we decided it didn't matter. We've decided to think positively about the fact that Ark-nim's video was broadcasted on the game exclusive news."

Ho Myung-hwan scratched his neck and continued speaking. In fact, the game publisher didn't have a problem with the broadcasting station. If the game showed on the broadcast then the users' interest would concentrate and it would be followed by a rise in sales. Therefore the game publishers actually lobbied the staff of the broadcasting station. However, the situation was different when it came to New World which had millions of players. In addition, Hyun-woo's video was such a hit that it reached 35%! Therefore as Hyun-woo signed an exclusive contract with him, Ho Myung-hwan was like his manager.

"However, there is one condition. Global Exos will check the video first and then we'll send it to the station."

The Planning Department wanted to review Hyun-woo's videos first to check that there were no hints about the master code before sending it to the station. So they had no problem with the broadcasting station's contract. Lee Yun-gyu looked through the contract and nodded.

"Then the fee will be 1.5 million won for every 10 minute video?"

'Heok!' 1-1.5 million won?'

Ark felt his breath catch as he listened to the copyright fee proposed by the broadcasting station. Of course, he had received 2 million won for the 'Netherworld exploration of a wicked wolf.' But that was a two hour movie. It was also selected as the winner of a special competition so the price received was the prize. But this was 1.5 million won for a 10 minute video! Since it was broadcasted once a week, that was 6 million won in 1 month! He could receive an income of 6 million won without even moving a finger.

'T-this is a jackpot!'

Hyun-woo swallowed his saliva at the thought. Then Ho Myung-hwan muttered with a weird expression.

"1.5 million won..... That's less than I thought."

"Huh?"

"I know the broadcaster's rating increased quite a bit. And the only thing the internet can talk about is the broadcast. Yet 1.5 million won for a 10 minute video when Ark-nim's gameplay increased the rating so much is a bit low don't you think?"

"1.5 million won isn't a small amount for a game video."

"That's true but 1.5 million won is a bit....."

"Wait a minute!"

At that moment Hyun-woo stood up and shouted.

"Wait a minute, I'm going to talk to this person and then come back in a bit."

"But....."

"It will only take a short time."

Hyun-woo suddenly dragged Ho Myung-hwan out of the meeting room. After moving far away, he frowned and muttered.

"Why are you doing this?"

"Huh? Why?"

"1.5 million won is being given for one game video. Don't I just have to edit and transfer the video? Yet why do you seem to be interfering? What is the problem with the game video that you said you would talk about later? Is this the Team Chief's way of getting revenge on me? I made a mistake but....."

Hyun-woo cried out as he placed a hand on Ho Myung-hwan's shoulder who muttered in a low voice.

"..... This is a problem."

He couldn't understand. Ark would be really upset if the contract failed because Ho Myung-hwan interfered. It was 6 million yen in one month. That was plenty of reason for him to be upset if the contract failed. When Hyun-woo glared at him, Ho Myung-hwan spoke with an embarrassed expression.

"Well, there seems to be some kind of misunderstanding?"

"What? You're the one interfering!"

"Why am I interfering? It's because the figure was really below my expectations."

Ho Myung-hwan then explained the circumstances.

"After the video was shown, the Planning Department also received offers from other broadcasting stations. They wanted to know the phone number of the user who appeared in the video."

Yes, the game exclusive news wasn't the only game broadcast in South Korea. Since the broadcast attracted such attention from viewers, other broadcasting stations became interested in Dark Wolf.

"The highest amount proposed was 1.8 million won."

"1-1.8 million won.....!"

Ho Myung-hwan's mouth gaped open at Hyun-woo's words. Hyun-woo had honestly thought that 1.5 million won was an extravagant price for a 10 minute video. However, 1.8 million won? If he had joyfully accepted the 1.5 million won contract then wouldn't he have lost 300,000 won? It was unthinkable to Hyun-woo but other broadcasting stations were really that interested in the video?

'The situation has completely changed.'

Ark's eyes turned to gold.

'This is an opportunity!'

Hyun-woo's thoughts rolled through his head before he entered the meeting room again.

"How about 3 million won for one video?"

Lee Yun-gyu and the Team Chief's faces stiffened at Hyun-woo's words. Ho Myung-hwan's expression was even more amazed. Of course the audience rating for the video was 35%. And the interest in Dark Wolf had run out of control! If they continued broadcasting Dark Wolf-related videos then a considerable audience rating would be secured. But no matter what, it was still a game video. When broadcasting other users' videos, it was customary to only give them a few hundred thousand won. No, it was just fortunate that their videos were even being shown on TV. Yet now he wanted 3 million won for a 10 minute video not related to a celebrity? It was unprecedented for the game exclusive news which was a low budget program.

'But they'll have to accept.'

Hyun-woo looked at the dumb faces Lee Yun-gyu and the Team Chief were making and smiled. Hyun-woo had no interest in the circumstances of the broadcasting station. But thanks to his underprivileged childhood, he had the ability to sense money. He sensed that it would be possible to ask for more money after listening to Ho Myung-hwan talk about other broadcasting stations.

‘I don’t know much about broadcasting stations but I know they fight among each other to get the highest ratings. And the game exclusive news broadcasts at the same time as 2 other game broadcasts. They are probably the ones who contacted Ho Myung-hwan.’

That was the reason why Hyun-woo had courage to ask for more money. Since Lee Yun-gyu mentioned the ratings, they would do anything to secure Hyun-woo’s guaranteed audience. Like he said, the viewer’s interest would be concentrated on Hyun-woo whenever they saw a video.

‘Yet they are trying to offer me a price 300,000 won lower than other broadcasting stations? If I had been hit in the back of the head with that then my heart really would be upset. Anyway, the situation has completely changed now that I know about the other broadcasting stations. The possibilities are endless. The person holding the sword hilt is me.’

The power of Hyun-woo’s video would increase the rating of the game exclusive news. Then what would happen if that video shifted to another broadcasting station? Yes, Hyun-woo thought of all this after hearing Ho Myung-hwan’s words. It was possible to decrease the ratings rather than increase them. The video could be used to increase the ratings of the broadcasting station. However, he could also use it to increase their ratings.

‘Anyway, even if the deal isn’t accepted then I can get 1.8 million won elsewhere.’

“3 million won.....that is.....”

The Team Chief's and Lee Yun-gyu's resistance faded away at his next words.

"Then I'll just have to go to S broadcasting station."

"W-wait a minute!"

When Hyun-woo turned around without any regrets, the Team Chief instantly jumped up and stopped him. He hesitated for a while before sighing and mumbling.

".....2.5 million won. Any more than that will be a problem."

"I accept. Then the fee for the video this time will be 3 million won instead."

Hyun-woo smiled and drove in a wedge. Thus Hyun-woo managed to get a fee for the video copyright at 8 times the price. The price per video was 2.5 million won. Along with the 5 million won contract deposit money, he also received 3 million won for the Lancel defensive war video. So he left the broadcasting station with 8 million won. However, there was still one problem remaining for Hyun-woo. The issue with the Global Exos breach of contract seemed to be resolved somehow. However, the rights of all Ark's videos belonged to Global Exos. If Hyun-woo wanted to broadcast the video on TV then he should also pay a certain amount of the fee to Global Exos.

'Do I have to give a part of the copyright fee to Global Exos?'

He had just received money and now it felt like he was being robbed. However, Ho Myung-hwan shook his head and said.

"The original agreement was that Global Exos would receive 30%. But Ha Myung-woo decided to discuss it with the team after seeing the results. Like I said when explaining the contract, the broadcasting station will have to receive our agreement first before they can post the video. If the contract is kept then all future copyright fees will be paid entirely to Ark-nim."

In other words, it had to go through prior censorship. But Hyun-woo didn't care as long as he earned money.

"Really? Thank you!"

"No, we should be thanking you instead."

"Huh?"

Ho Myung-hwan smiled at Hyun-woo's confusion.

"Didn't I tell you? I was yelled at by the Team Chief because of Ark-nim's video."

"Oh, I'm sorry. The circumstances....."

"It's okay. It's because Ark-nim showed the video that an unexpected thing occurred."

"What does that mean?"

"Actually we received a call from the head office this morning. After the video was shown yesterday, at least 7 million new users have signed up for New World. Can you believe it?"

Yes, that was the reason why Ho Myung-hwan was excited this morning. Thanks to Hyun-woo's video, there was an explosion of interest in New World. The number of those people was 7 million! And 40,000 people have also bought the game unit. The unit was tens of millions of won and combined with the subscription amount for New World, Global Exos had received hundreds of billions in sales in just one day. It was an astronomical amount beyond imagination!

'What? Then isn't it Global Exos who received the profit in the end?'

He thought sarcastically. Anyway, the standards were in an entirely different world. Billions of won going into their pocket was like millions of won going into other people's pocket.

‘Anyway, I still received 8 million won. In two months I can make 20 million won!’

His heart warmed after his wallet became thicker.

“I’ll treat you to a meal since you came all the way here.”

“Huh? No, you don’t have to.....”

“It’s okay. There is a place where I used to work part time near here. It won’t be a burden. It’s not a very expensive place.”

“Hah, then I guess..... Since it is already like this.....”

Ho Myung-hwan was unable to decline and ended up following Hyun-woo. After crossing several lanes.

“T-this is it?”

“The food here tastes pretty good. It was also a good job.”

Hyun-woo laughed as he looked at the simple tent erected on a vacant land. A phrase was written on top of the tent.

Assisted by the Youth Campaign (Sandwich: 2, 000 won. Proceeds will go towards public utilities.)

‘Someone who just received 8 million won is treating me to a 2,000 won sandwich?’

Ho Myung-hwan looked at Hyun-woo with an amazed expression. But Hyun-woo just lifted an eyebrow and ordered a sandwich before sitting down.

‘Buying a meal for 2,000 won is a luxury. By the way, my mother’s wheelchair is also very old. I have a large sum of money so I should change it to an electric wheelchair. Didn’t I see on the internet that the best electric wheelchair cost 6 million won? Well, it is fine if the price is that much.’

Hyun-woo smiled happily as he ate his sandwich

Act 7: Lancel's New Town Plan

"Oppa, is it finished?"

Roco approached the warehouse with sparkling eyes. Ark nodded with a tired complexion and handed her a scroll.

"Yes, it's done. This is the catalogue."

"Wah, when arranged like this it really is no joke."

Roco's mouth widened as Ark handed her the scroll and she unfolded it. There were 10 scrolls with lists of various ingredients written on it.

'It was hard work but very rewarding.'

Ark looked at the scroll with satisfaction. After returning from the broadcasting station, Ark had stayed at the warehouse for several hours creating the scrolls. Thanks to that, Ark completely looked like a wet rag but he felt satisfied. It was unnecessary to explain again but the battle for Lancel village was vital for Ark. During that time he barely ate at all. He was so worried about the situation that he wondered if he would have to jump off the Han River Bridge. But thanks to some smart and excellent strategies, Ark had overcome the desperate crisis. And there was always a big chance after a crisis was conquered. Of course, not everyone received that chance after the crisis. The only way was to help themselves! Ark never stopped thinking about 'how can I earn money from this battle?' in every situation. Since chaotic users were attacking the village, Ark couldn't overlook the equipment of Jewel's group. When a chaotic user died, there was a 100% chance of dropping one equipment. In other words, the equipment piled up after wiping out Jewel's 500 strong group.

'The problem is how to collect all of it.'

Apart from the NPCs from the village, he had also mobilized 400 users in this defensive war. It would be impossible for him to remove all the users and collect the equipment. Of course, if Ark and Radun ran around then they could collect some equipment but a lot would be claimed by other users. It would be extremely vexing that he couldn't 100% monopolize it. Ark's pride couldn't tolerate having such a huge sum of money taken away. So he came up with the method to make Radun an airborne troop. Ark was able to grasp the battlefield thanks to the split screens. He instantly knew the location where a lot of Jewel's group had died. Once he received that information, he would send Radun wrapped around Racard to that area. It was a strategy to urgently swallow the items as soon as they dropped.

'Hopefully I can monopolize 30~40%! The problem is that the users might notice Radun.....'

But there was some unforeseen good fortune once the battle started. Heavy rain started pouring down. The dark clouds also obscured the sky making it a pitch black night. Moreover, the relentless rains turned the ground to mud. With Protective Colouration, Radun was difficult to distinguish by the users and he managed to swallow the equipment. And the darkness, rain and mud were all helpful to Radun. Radun used Stalking and could quickly find the equipment near the corpses before swallowing them. After swallowing too much, he would have to throw it up at the store's warehouse before returning to the battlefield. So Radun had managed to swallow 213 equipment! In addition, Ark had also collected 38 items while running around. The total sum was 251 equipment. Ark and Radun had managed to sweep up 50% of the loot!

'Ohhhh, this is spectacular!'

Ark shed impressed tears after the battle as he saw the 251 equipment piled up in the warehouse. A mountain of japtem! No, to be exact it was a pile of money!

'Now I just have to sell it!'

If he couldn't sell the lot then he wouldn't get any money from it. However, there was a problem when he thought about how to sell it. When he put the item in the bag there was no restrictions in volume but once taken outside it would return to the original volume. Furthermore, all the items collected this time was equipment. Just one metal armour would occupy considerable space. The store wouldn't be able to display all 251 equipment.

'I guess I have to display it little by little until it sells.....'

But the shelves in Ark's store were already filled with various items. Even if he created more space, he would only be able to display 10 equipment. He had more than 200 equipment yet he could only display 10.

'I have to think of a plan to quickly get rid of those items.....'

Then Ark had a sudden idea. It was to create a catalogue of the items. Armour, weapons, gloves, shoes, leathers, metal..... The equipment was divided into their category and the performance written down. If there was a detailed list then the shelves weren't necessary to promote the goods to customers. Yes, the scrolls Ark handed to Roco were the catalogue! Well, the idea of a catalogue wasn't exactly new. However, there was something different about the catalogue Ark created.

'I have to buy thing for as cheap as possible and then sell it for as high as possible. But it will irritate customers if I sell it for too high a price. The way to stimulate the customer's desire to buy.....'

Once again, Ark knew that the interest in Dark Wolf transcended imagination. Ark was confused by such popularity but he knew about the interest after his experience at the broadcasting station.

'There is no reason not to use it!'

Ark thought about using the name Dark Wolf for business. Ark had a description from Dark Wolf written on the catalogue for each item.

-Halben's Jack knife (Magic)

Armour type: Dagger

Attack: 20~22

Durability: 90/90

Weight: 20

User restriction: Level 220 or higher with Thief profession

A sharp retractable dagger. Among all dagger weapons, this one on average is one of the fastest. As the folding dagger is good for hiding it on the body, a lot of thieves tend to use it. Halben's jack knife is a cruel and brutal weapon known for having poison coated on it.

<Option: Agility +18, Due to the Acid Poison there is a 20% chance of causing the opponent to be poisoned for 5 minutes>

* Dark Wolf's Product Description: After trying it out, the 20% chance of poison is very good. Since a thief relies on continuous hits, a weapon which sucks health over time is the best type of weapon. It is recommended for both hunting and PVP. Your level might be insufficient but you won't regret it if you buy it in advance.

* Recommended price: 69 gold and 99 silver

-Old Steel Helmet

Armour type: Steel helmet

Defense: 48

Durability: 120/120

Weight: 33

User restriction: Level 200 or higher with Warrior profession

An ordinary steel helmet. The iron it is made of isn't very good so you

can't expect a large defense from it.

* Dark Wolf's Product Description: If you look at the explanation then you know it is an ordinary helmet. But it only has 10 less defense than a magic helmet which costs 50 gold extra. In addition, the added stats on a magic helmet wouldn't be that much. If you consider the performance of the helmet and its price, this is a good fit with other magic items.

* Recommended price: 19 gold and 99 silver.....

It was a similar method as attaching the video of Dark Wolf to the auction site. In addition, he was even more famous than he was before! Dark Wolf was promoting items in the village where the actual Dark Wolf was active! Moreover, while Ark was creating the catalogue he restored the durability using Advanced Magic Restoration. It would be difficult to sell it while the durability was decreased from the battle. Therefore he worked several hours without a break restoring the items and writing their descriptions, but it was all for the sake of his future income.

'The equipment collected this time are mostly general items but I'm not upset about it.'

He knew that Jewel's group wouldn't drop any expensive equipment. The battle they started was one in which they risked life and death. Of course, they needed to secure a minimum offense and defense in order to increase the success rate so they used general items. And the rear support of the secret society were equipped with magic items. Surprisingly, the total sum for the products in the catalogue was 8,750 gold! He could obtain 87.5 million won from the 251 items Jewel dropped!

'As expected, war is the most profitable business to earn money.'

He earned that much income in one day so he couldn't feel tired. But that wasn't all of Ark's income.

"Take this."

“What, what is it?”

“It’s the insurance money. If the users come then please check their contracts and distribute it.”

Ark said as he handed her a large purse of money. Yes, it was the earnings from ‘Ark’s Compensation Insurance.’ The insurance was needed in order to persuade users to enter the war after they worried about having their equipment stolen. But when considering the circumstances, it was quite a lucrative business. That’s because during a war it wasn’t profitable to continuously use the scrolls.

‘That’s it. That’s at least 2,500 gold profit!’

As expected, Ark made a significant profit by the end of the fight. However, there were two unexpected variables at the very last moment.

‘Those bastards, if they were going to die then they should’ve just died. Is this a joke? If they wanted to commit suicide then why didn’t they just jump into the Han River?’

It was because of the suicide squad’s biggest weapon. Since they were using a kamikaze style attack on the village, he had no choice but to extend the insurance payout to equipment that were broken from the Self-destruct. Thanks to that the damage of Lancel village barely stayed below 30% but he had to pay out a lot of insurance money. So the payout ended up adding to 1,800 gold!

‘Well, there’s still 700 gold remaining…….’

Their equipment broke but the users managed to stop the Self-destruct. If all the equipment broke he would’ve suffered a loss of 1000 gold. The thought of his 2500 gold being shaved down by 1800 gold was heartbreaking.

‘It can’t be helped. I made some profit so I should be satisfied.’

Ark soothed his pain with the thought. And the situation wasn't completely heartbreaking. He obtained 8,750 gold from the equipment. The insurance business was 700 gold. This clean-up of this battle alone got him a profit of 9,450 gold. He also received 8 million offline from signing the contract with the broadcasting station. On the other hand, not only did he take profit from Jewel's group but they were also in jail. Even if he couldn't put all 500 members into a jail cell, putting half of them in wasn't bad. He had managed to eradicate some pests and make money.

'As expected, a person has to have an aggressive mind.'

He never would've got all of this if he kept his passive attitude! But Ark had no intention of being satisfied with this much.

'This victory is just a foothold in my future plans.'

Ark sensed the time to start the plan he prepared beforehand was fast approaching. No, to be exact it had already begun.

'But it is still premature. There is still a lot of work to be done. And the thing that is most necessary is money. I've put most of it into real estate but I still need a bit more. I need to tighten my belt even more!'

"Oppa where are you going?"

Roco's voice who received the insurance payout could be heard.

"Well, I need to do a few things before I return."

"You will return to the warehouse later? It's been a while since I've seen you."

Roco whined like a child. And Sapjil and Ulmeok who were carrying things from the warehouse to store looked like they wanted to vomit. Then Roco turned her back and started whistling as she looked at the distant mountains. Ark laughed before tapping Roco on the back and said.

"I understand. When my business ends then we'll go hunting together."

"Really? You promise?"

Roco laughed and returned to the store. Ark exited the store and walked around surveying the village. The shattered wreckage of buildings caught his eye. At the end of the battle, Ark confirmed that 23% of the structures had been damaged. It wasn't a small amount of damage. That meant 1 in 4 buildings had received damage. And out of the 60 buildings damaged, 30 had been so destroyed that repairing them was impossible. Just looking around the town it could be seen how intense the battle was. Therefore the real estate market price had fallen by 30% compared to before the battle. Ark had a 4% stake in Lancel village so he also suffered significant losses. But Ark didn't worry about it.

'It is highly likely that this battle will cause Lancel village to grow instead.'

After the TV broadcast of the Lancel defensive war, it wasn't just Dark Wolf, Shambala, Bread and Redian who became famous. Lancel which was the stage for the battle also became incredibly famous. It hadn't even been one day since the battle ended yet a large number of users had flocked from nearby areas. It was similar to tourists gathering at movie or drama location shoots.

"Wah, it really is the same as what I saw on TV."

"Look here. This is the building that was destroyed by the thieves' Self-destruct skill."

"Ohhhh! I saw it, I saw it."

"Let's take a photo here!"

They users went around taking photos of the building wreckage. Ark couldn't understand why but it was good that a lot of people had gathered. The development of an NPC village depended on how many users visited it. Money was always located where a lot of people

gathered. Without this fame, it would take a long time for the real estate market to recover.

‘If a lot of users gathered then it’s not unpleasant.’

Ark smirked and exited the residential area. Then he suddenly saw Bread hiding behind a building. Bread had played the game for almost 24 hours so he disconnected for a bit.

“Hey, Bread!”

Ark waved his hand and approached as he found Bread. Then Bread jumped with astonishment and quickly looked around. He sighed with relief as he saw Ark and grabbed his arm before pulling him behind a building.

“What? What is it?”

“Shhh, Shhh! You idiot, don’t be so loud!”

Bread looked around and whispered in a low voice.

“What’s going on? Did you meet a debt collector or something?”

“Damn.....I would’ve preferred the creditors.”

Bread sighed before suddenly glaring at Ark.

“Yes, that’s right. You are the source. This is all your fault!”

“What are you talking about? What did I do?”

“If you hadn’t shown my face on TV.....”

“Are you running away from creditors who found you?”

“That’s not it! Are you playing around?”

Bread looked at Ark with an angry expression. The reason Bread was in a 100% annoyed state was because of the users gathered in Lancel village. Yes, Bread’s face was shown nationwide on the TV.

In other words he had become famous. Of course, Bread and Redian were already known as Bristania's strongest pair so they were already celebrities. But their previous success was nothing compared to what happened after their faces were shown on TV. The users who found Bread and Redian in the village flocked like sparrows that had discovered earthworms.

"What are your levels?"

"What technique was that? Where did you learn it from?"

"What equipment do you use? I also wear leather equipment so where can I get some as good as yours?"

Bread and Redian were annoyed by their relentless chirping.

".....If it was just that much I could endure it. It is just like Paradon.

Bread sighed and shook his head. The problem was the school aged users. When creating a character in New World, it was possible to choose the age. Thus it was impossible to know the user's actual age just looking at the character's appearance. But it was possible to tell if someone often played online games. Who the school aged children were.....Of course, they didn't vary that much from general users. The problem was that the childish users often didn't let go once they caught something. And Bread had been tightly caught by them.

"Hey, are you Bread?"

"How did you fight that well? Can you teach me?"

The childish users chased after Bread like goldfish. Thanks to that, Bread's blood pressure went up as he couldn't escape them. But how could the village hero murder them? While Bread was chaotic, he had been using the [Lie] scroll in order to prevent being kicked out of the village. The same went for Redian. Furthermore, the opponents were just kids. Wouldn't it be slightly embarrassing if they used their power on them? Therefore Redian had separated from Bread and disconnected.

However, Bread had a reason for not stopping the connection like Redian.

“Damn! I decided to go hunting with the Wolrang at a nearby cave but I can’t do that with those kids around. The Wolrang will have to wait.”

After participating in the battle, his intimacy with the Wolrang had increased greatly. Therefore, Bread’s dream of having a good relationship with the dog/wolf was coming true. That was the best reward Bread got from this battle! And as soon as the battle ended, he made an appointment to go hunting with the Wolrang. But now he couldn’t go to the meeting place while being chased after by the schoolchildren. If they chased him all the way to the hunting grounds then it would be unbearable. The dreadful power of the schoolchildren made the level 410 Bread hide from them! How should he say it.....? Was it courageous or ignorant?

‘Tsk tsk tsk, this is really troublesome.’

Anyway, Ark looked at Bread with pitying eyes after understanding the circumstances. But this problem occurred because he didn’t wear a mask or transform himself like Ark. But hiding the face after finally getting to go on TV was a bit.....

“Then keep up the effort. I have things to do. I hope you escape safely.”

“W-wait a minute, can’t you do something?”

“Like what?”

“You’re more famous than me. If you transform into Dark Wolf and attract their attention.....”

“No thanks.”

After transforming into Dark Wolf, Ark would be buried in users. Why would he intentionally transform himself into Dark Wolf? When Ark snorted and refused, Bread shouted angrily.

“Do you really want to be that uncooperative? Because of you I participated in the war.....”

“Ah, there he is!”

“I’ve found him. Catch him!”

At that time a hobbit shouted and pointed towards Bread. It was the childish users annoying Bread. Bread’s face instantly became confused as the hobbit appeared and he ran away. Then the hobbit cursed and started chasing after Bread.

“Damn Ark, you should help me a little bit!”

‘How? The schoolkids are frightening. I’ll just pretend I didn’t see this.....’

Ark pretended not to hear Bread’s SOS and turned around. Then a playful smile spread on his face as he wandered around.

‘Speaking of which, how is that guy doing?’

“Blue Sword!”

Ark looked around as a hobbit yelled. The place it was coming from was the wreckage of a building. One man was sitting down in front of it. It was the masked Shambala wearing black clothes. The hobbits had found another celebrity and flocked around Shambala.

“Oh thanks Ark! Shambala, I’ll leave this to you!”

The hobbits who had been chasing Bread showed interest in Shambala and Bread instantly escaped. Meanwhile, the hobbits just laughed at the sight of their new toy.

“Hahaha, you’re Blue Sword?”

“What the, this is?”

Shambala looked at the hobbits with bewildered eyes. While he had been lost in thought, he hadn't realized he was in the same area as Bread and Ark.

"Are you pretending ignorance?"

"How did you fight that well? Can you teach me?"

"Huhuhu, if you want to hit then hit me. The guards will protect us!"

The hobbits laughed as they irritated Shambala.

'Now, what will Shambala do?'

Ark smirked and waited for Shambala's reaction. Then Shambala rose from his seat without speaking a word. Then he opened both hands and swept the hobbits inside the dim alley. Shambala's voice could then be heard from the alley.

"Death's Agent....."

Bam, bam, bam, bam, bam, bam!

"Hik, what, what the?"

"What is with this person? S-save me....heok!"

After a while, a hobbit crawled from the alley with a bruised face. But before the hobbit could escape the alley, a hand grabbed his ankle and dragged him back in. And the sounds started again.

'He took care of the schoolkids situation in seconds. What a scary guy.....'

Shambala was completely different from Bread. If he didn't like someone then he would beat them up. That was Shambala! However, Shambala also had a weakness. After beating up the schoolkids, Shambala once again appeared and flopped down in front of the shattered building with a sigh.

“Damn! How dare they destroy Seutandal’s branch here with Self-destruct? If she finds out that it has been destroyed then Isabel will be worried..... It can’t be helped. I’ll have to secretly fix it before Isabel finds out, even if I have to use my personal funds. No. 358, keep it a secret from Isabel that our branch has received damage. Understood? By the way, do you know what is necessary to repair this building?”

Shambala sighed again as he rummaged through his bag.

Yes, the buildings damaged by the battle would be repaired using the village’s public funds. However, the Seutandal branch was the property of the Eastern Nation. Thus the Eastern Nation would have to bear the cost of the repair fees.

“Bread and Shambala, everyone has their own worries.”

Ark clicked his tongue as he stared at the dismal looking Shambala.

“Well, it’s none of my business. Their weaknesses make them easy to use.”

Ark muttered with an evil smile. Bread and Redian really liked dogs and cats. Isabel was also Shambala’s weakness. Once Ark grasped their weaknesses, he was able to use it to his advantage. Actually Shambala, Bread and Redian had participated in the battle because of that. Therefore he couldn’t understand their complicated lives.

“Compared to that money isn’t bad. It is simple.”

Ark muttered before turning to the residents with a dark look and sighing. The smile on Ark’s face had completely disappeared. In fact, Ark didn’t just feel satisfied from the results of this battle. While Shambala had a weakness, Ark also had something like that.

‘The NPCs that I know and associated with.....’

Ark looked at the NPCs with a bittersweet look. They were NPCs who had lost family in the battle. Yes, the damage was less than expected but 13% of residents were still lost. The total population was 700 people and

13% of that had died. That was 90 NPCs sacrificed. Of course, this battle determined whether Lancel was destroyed or not. He knew that a certain amount would be lost but the 13% sacrifice was more than expected.

‘Theoretically I know. Although I know.....’

If it was a different place then he would’ve enjoyed the victory. However, Ark was the one who convinced the residents to relocate to Lancel. While Ark had been worried about Lancel’s future, they were all power Ark had been acquainted with. Those NPCs had disappeared. While users could just revive, the NPCs were an existence that disappeared when they died so his chest was in pain.

‘But.....’

The NPCs were already dead. Galen had already arranged for the funerals of the victims and paid compensation to their grieving families so there was nothing he could do.

‘Yes, my chest hurts because of the NPCs but let’s think about protecting the ones remaining. Now I have to quickly begin my plan for the remaining NPCs. I have to stop even more NPCs from being sacrificed.’

Ark became determined and headed towards the Town Hall. Ark had already made some plans for the future after the battle finished. No, it was because of the battle that his plans for the future became clear. But before that plan could be implemented, he had to clean up everything first. One of them was the <Find New Settlers> quest. Since the battle finished, he was going to receive the compensation and then start the next plan.

“Although the sacrifice of the residents is heartbreaking, but public affairs was public affairs. I have to bring all things to an end. Now the chances of Galen giving a rare or unique item wasn’t very high. Then will I be given more shares in the village?”

Ark tilted his head at the thought of the compensation.

“A share in the village isn’t bad. Even if it is 1% and the market price fell, it would still be 2,000 gold. Besides, once the price increases in the future then it will be 100 times better than an item. But nevertheless, there is a possibility that he will give an item as reward. Perhaps? Maybe Galen has a heirloom hidden or something?”

It was a quest which took 1 year and 6 months to complete! Whatever compensation it was, Ark couldn’t be disappointed.

‘Finally.....!’

After a short time, Ark arrived at the Town Hall. Then he entered with his heart pounding.

“Ark, you’ve come!”

Galen who was at the Town Hall grabbed Ark’s hand.

‘Ohh, was he waiting for me to come?’

Ark came to a hasty conclusion and became even more eager. Anyway, Galen knew he liked money. Wasn’t it a nice feeling when an NPC was eager to hand over compensation?

“Well, it is natural. Don’t you know? Lancel village is like my home. Fighting for Lancel village is an honourable thing to me. You can ask for anything in the future.”

“Ohhh, thank you. As expected, I can only believe in you!”

“Hahaha! Well, it is natural.....”

Ark boldly laughed and secretly reached out his hand. He was expecting to receive his reward now. And Galen nodded before pulling out a scroll and handed it to him.

‘Scroll? Is the compensation a share in the village?’

That was the only thing he could think when seeing the scroll.

‘A share in the village isn’t bad. The question is how much percentage I was given..... Huh?’

Perplexity spread on Ark’s face as he opened the scroll. The scroll didn’t indicate a transfer of village shares.

Village Reconstruction Supervisore Appointment

You have been nominated by the council of Lancel Village to be in charge of the village reconstruction. The guidelines for the reconstruction work are enclosed on the reverse side.

Temporary mayor of Lancel village, Galen.

‘What is this? Village Reconstruction Supervisor Appointment? Is this really the reward?’

Ark looked at the appointment scroll with a stupid expression. Then Galen tapped Ark’s shoulder and said.

“Although I should be the one in charge of the work, there is an urgent situation and I need to leave for several days. So I wanted to choose the right person. You’re the only one I can entrust it to. I feel sorry for dumping this on you but I am relieved by your previous words. Then please do this for me.”

“You’re going? Where are you going? No, my reward.....?”

“I’m sorry. I’m really in a hurry. I’ll give you the details when I return.”

“W-wait a minute!”

“I’ll be back in a few days!”

Galen then disappeared into the crowd. After Galen disappeared, a quest information window appeared in front of Ark.

<Find New Settlers> sub quest has been updated.

* Sub quest: Lancel village defensive war= Lancel village’s

reconstruction project

Thanks to your efforts, Lancel village has been protected from a band of thieves. Unfortunately, the damage Lancel village received wasn't a small amount. If it is left alone then the satisfaction of the residents will fall.

The war will only truly end when the village is restored to its previous state. The interim mayor Galen has left the village reconstruction to you who have obtained the trust of the residents. Repair the village within the budget of Lancel village. You cannot fail this quest. However, if you give up this quest then you can't receive any compensation for the <Find New Settlers> quest.

<Difficulty: ???>

<Additional Fact: The reconstruction of the village will depend on several numbers such as commerce, development etc. The compensation for the quest will be paid when the village reconstruction is finished. However, the additional compensation received will depend on the percentage of completion for the village reconstruction>

'Sub quest?'

Ark read the information window with shocked eyes. When Galen had run away and pushed the quest on him, anger instantly welled up. He went to all that trouble during the Lancel defensive war and now he had to reconstruct the village as well?

'What? Isn't this just taking advantage of a nice guy? I might be busy.....'

Now he had to do this task as well. At that moment, some raccoon workmen wearing helmets emerged from the crowd.

"Ark-nim, please give us some orders."

"Damn, I don't know!"

Ark snapped at the raccoons, causing them to flinch. They suddenly looked at Ark with worried eyes before starting to back away.

“Why all of a sudden?”

“I don’t know, but he doesn’t seem pleasant right now.”

“What do we do? The water is already drying up and we don’t know where to start working.”

“But we have to repair the damaged buildings as well.”

“We need instructions from Ark-nim to begin that work.”

“Yes, we’ll have to talk to him even if he looks unpleasant.”

The raccoons finished a sneaky work meeting and approached.

“Ark-nim, do you want us to rebuild Lancel village the same way as it previously was?”

“I don’t care!”

Ark yelled and turned his body. He knew there was an audience. But despite it being a quest, wasn’t it too horrible? Telling a person expecting compensation to suddenly supervise the reconstruction? Although he could receive additional compensation depending on the percentage of compensation, Ark didn’t care about the reconstruction work. The raccoons were the ones clearing the debris of the collapsed building so what could Ark do?

‘Damn, that quest is just a waste of time!’

Ark complained and was returning to his store. Then there was an abrupt spark in his brain.

‘Wait? Reconstruction? Construction?’

Ark stopped walking and looked around with bemused eyes. The village entrance, plaza, shopping centre and residential street. Ark looked at the structure of the village before he had an idea.

‘Maybe.....this might be a chance..... No.....it definitely is an opportunity!’

Ark reached that conclusion and immediately returned to the Town Hall. Then he interrupted the raccoons who were about to return to their workshop and laughed.

“I gratefully accept the position as supervisor of the Lancel Reconstruction Project. Before starting work, please have a filling meal. You’ll need your strength for the work.”

“Ark-nim, the wood has arrived!”

A group of raccoons arrived carrying a bunch of wood planks.

“Don’t disrupt the passage so set it down in that corner.”

“Ark-nim, the stone has arrived!”

“It’ll be used to repair the outer stone walls so please pile it up there.”

Ark flew around and issued orders. Once Ark accepted the supervisor role, the Lancel Reconstruction Project began in earnest.

Ddok ttak, ddok ttak, ssuk ssak, ssuk ssak!

Excited sounds rang out through the village.

The wreckage of the old buildings was cleared away and scaffolds for the new buildings were erected. The former thieves who had changed professions to workmen from the raccoons were hammering in nails at the scaffolds for the new buildings. The scene really looked like the construction of a new village. Once all the NPCs in Lancel were

mobilized, the entrance already looked like the old one. However, Ark's goal wasn't to restore the 'old look.'

'Was I crazy? Did I really say there was no profit from this?'

Yes, previously Ark hadn't cared about the reconstruction project. Therefore there was no need for him to help out or give individual orders.

'Huhuhu, luckily I thought of an amazing idea!'

Ark smiled and praised himself.

"Ark-nim."

One of the raccoons called out to him and approached.

"I've been looking at the blueprints distributed by Ark-nim. Those buildings over there are so damaged that we'll have to destroy it while it is possible to restore that building. But there is a building that isn't shown on the blueprint. Was there a mistake?"

The raccoon pointed to a building at the entrance of the village. In fact, most of the Lancel buildings damaged were in a similar style. There were several buildings which the suicide squad didn't directly hit. Since the users stopped the suicide squad, most of the buildings had been indirectly damaged. The building the raccoon indicated had a perfect interior but several cracks on the outer walls. However, Ark shook his head.

"No, it's not a mistake."

"Huh? Then?"

"Destroy any buildings that aren't listened on the blueprint."

"Destroy? But the building can be repaired and used....."

The raccoon couldn't understand Ark's words.

“Can’t you understand by looking at the blueprint? The front of that building is blocking the entrance. It is the first thing that guests here will see. Of course it can be repaired but wouldn’t the marks from repairing it make it an unseemly sight? I don’t want that building to be the first image of our village. Would you want the village to be disagreeable to guests?”

“But it will look better if we repair it.....”

“Are you the supervisor?”

Ark shot the raccoon an annoyed look. Then the raccoon hung his tail and hesitated.

“I have my own way of thinking. Stop chattering and just do it.”

“I understand.”

The raccoon nodded and turned around. Then Ark opened the blueprint and checked it again.

“Ah, and build a new road from the building and heading to this direction. The necessary materials for the road are prepared and flank the road on both sides with a flowerbed. The seedlings are already prepared by the Meow so you just have to put down the foundations.”

“A road?”

“Well, the village will grow in the future so we’ll have to do some readjustments to the village plan. We don’t want to be inferior to other villages.”

Ark laughed as he spoke.

‘Okay, it is gradually turning into the village I want.’

Ark looked proudly at the village that was slowly changing. Yes, the reason why Ark changed his mind about the reconstruction project was because he thought ‘this is the chance to make the village I want.’ In fact, Ark hadn’t really liked the previous structure of Lancel village. The

original Lancel village was a small mountain village with 30 buildings. And it had been 1 year and 6 months. It had grown increasingly larger as more beasts and people resettled here. Therefore the 30 buildings kept on increasing as more residents moved here. Gradually stores popped up and the place where there were no buildings became the town square. It was no different from a real growth process. Thus there were also issues that occurred in reality. Just like any old city, it wasn't really balanced. From the beginning a large town hadn't been planned so they just built buildings where necessary. Sometimes houses made of wood or stone were mixed indiscriminately, and sometimes lanes were blocked by a new building. It was so uncomfortable that sometimes the people living there would have to exit through their neighbour's back door. Ark thought the reconstruction project was a good chance to fix the issue.

'Fortunately Lancel village has abundant public funds.'

When he first thought up the plans, Ark had checked the amount of public funds available. If there wasn't an abundant budget then it wasn't possible to begin the construction. But the budget was really rich. Lancel village was one co-produced and built by the ex-thieves, raccoons, Meow and the Wolrang. So the proceeds earned in the village went into the public funds. Thus the reconstruction business didn't just involve the collapsed buildings. Anyway, thanks to that the public funds weren't a problem. Ark also hadn't used any of the public funds to hire users so he could invest that money back into the reconstruction projects. And the person in charge of the reconstruction was Ark! As the supervisor Ark visited the cartographer Hanson. Then he commissioned him to produce a perfect town blueprint.

"It is a good idea. The structure of the town has also been weighing on my mind. The village will have to do some maintenance if it wants to grow bigger in the future."

Hanson strongly agreed with Ark's idea and spent all night working on the blueprint. Then he handed the blueprint to the raccoons. However, Ark's wicked scheme was hidden in the blueprint.

‘Huhuhu, if the village changes according to the plan.....’

The appearance of Lancel village would certainly be cleaner than before. However, it was entirely for the sake of Lancel village. Once again, Lancel village was recovering from an attack by Jewel’s group. And Jewel’s main target was Ark’s store. Therefore the suicide squads had headed towards Ark’s store from the entrance. In other words, the buildings that received the most damage were between the village entrance and Ark’s store! Then couldn’t he use it as an excuse to remove all the buildings during the reconstruction project?

‘Then Ark’s store can be seen as seen as someone enters the village!’

Yes, this was the hidden motive behind Ark’s reconstruction projects. In fact, Ark had another reason not to like the structure of Lancel village. Thanks to Ark’s hard work, he had finally managed to receive a store building in the village. The building was located deep in the residential section of the village. Thus it was hard for users to find Ark’s store when they first entered the village. Even if they had visited beforehand and knew where the location was, they would have to travel through a complicated route from the shopping area to reach Ark’s store.

‘I can’t afford to have any customers stolen away by NPC stores. All the users who come to Lancel are my customers! I can’t miss even one customer.’

Therefore Ark removed all the buildings blocking his store and built a road to it.

‘Once entering the village, it will be visible within 3 minutes!’

This was Ark’s final goal with the reconstruction project. And the plan became obvious in a few days. After knocking down the buildings according to the blueprint, Ark’s shop could be seen from three village entrances.

However it wasn’t enough!

“Now lay out the road and create the flower bed!”

Ark started the 2nd stage after the building finished being demolished. It was a road connected Ark's store to the village entrance. But the road had been completely designed by Ark. Using black and white pebbles, he created a design of an arrow on the road. The arrow pointed right to Ark's store! The flower beds were also the same. The plants and flowers were carefully laid and pruned to lead towards Ark's store. Now any users who entered the village would unconsciously look at Ark's store. And the third thing was the new signposts in the village.

→Shopping area

← Village square

↑ Residential area (Ark's Store)

....There was no need to explain the village signpost. The entire village was like an advertisement for Ark's store! Of course, protests came in from other NPC stores. But the supervisor in charge of the reconstruction project was Ark! Ark played dumb and pretended not to know anything.

"Eh? Why are the paving stones laid like this? What happened to the flower bed? Hah, this sign.... He pretended that something had gone wrong with the task instructions.

"But it can't be helped. All this time and money has been spent so how can we just demolish the road? The next chance I have I'll adjust it."

Ark's skill to prevaricate was just like a politician's. And thanks to the TV broadcast, many players flocked to Ark's store as planned. But Ark wasn't satisfied with just that. He had to strike while it was still hot.

-There is an enormous volume of equipment guaranteed by Dark Wolf!

It is a great opportunity to purchase level 150~300 equipment at a cheap price!

* A three day 10% sales event is in progress.

Ark had placed such placards in front of his store. It was an opportunity to get rid of the equipment obtained from Jewel's group. As planned, the users flocked around the catalogue and ordered goods.

"I want item no. 96, the jack knife that Dark Wolf used directly!"

"Item no. 140 that Dark Wolf recommended, the Nameless Bow!"

Once one item sold, a fire would be lit and the remaining items sold. The other goods in the store would also be sold.

"I have change left so give me one herbal medicine set!"

"Two potions please!"

"Ah, yes yes!"

Sapjil and Ulmeok said with tearful eyes as they took the orders. They were so busy that Ark's summons had to be put to work.

"Well, well! Who ordered the potions just now?"

"Me!"

A user's hands raised as Racard flew over their heads. Then Racard headed towards the user with Radun clinging to him.

"Here are you things!"

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

Radun's mouth opened and he spat out the potion.

"Give the money to the skeleton over there. Next, the person who ordered the herbal medicine set."

Clack clack clack, clack clack clack clack!

While Racard flew to other users, the skeletal Razak approached the user. With a clink clink, the potions were paid for and the skeleton laughed before approaching the next customer. There were so many guests that

they all couldn't enter the store, so Ark used his summons for a street sale. But the desperate plan he came up with was more popular than expected.

"A bat is taking our orders while a snake spits it out?"

"This skeleton is receiving the money without any supervision? So fun!"

"That skeleton was also on TV! The one with the fire shield!"

"I've also seen that bat and snake before. They were with Dark Wolf!"

"So this shop really is related to Dark Wolf!"

"How amazing. I'm here so one scroll please!"

"Me too! One herbal medicine set!"

'Huhuhu, I am the Dark Wolf you're talking about.'

Ark looked at the users gathered in front of the store from far away and laughed. The gold was flying from their hands into Ark's pocket!

'The reconstruction of Lancel's new town plan is 80% complete. The remainder is entrusted to the raccoons.'

But Ark still had one thing to do that was separate from the reconstruction. The work related to Ark's store was just a part of it. Ark called over the raccoons.

"Have you finished the construction on the square? Now I want a new structure to be built near the centre of the square. Please refer to the draft on the reverse side of the blueprint."

"Huh? This wasn't in the plans....."

The raccoons carefully looked at the draft. The structure Ark wanted built was a huge tower 10 metre in height. It was a flash tower made of marble! It was a structure that used 4,000 gold in the budget by itself.

“But it is an essential structure. Please hurry.”

Ark ordered with determination. Then the raccoons started to express their dissatisfaction.

“What? This structure?”

“It also seems like there is some writing on the outside of the structure.”

“Don’t tell me it is a propaganda signboard for Ark’s store?”

“The village has been attacked and everybody is in great pain but Ark-nim is only using the public money to advertise his store.....I’m disappointed.”

It was impossible for the NPCs doing the reconstruction not to figure out that the reconstruction was just improving the location of Ark’s store. Even if he was the saviour who helped the village, it was too much. And now he wanted them to do this as well? The residents of the village were still grieving and they couldn’t stand such greed! Even if the residents trusted Ark unconditionally, this was too much for them.

“What are you doing? I told you to hurry!”

But Ark just rushed the residents without worrying about their dissatisfaction. Despite their complaints, Ark was the supervisor so they started work on the structure. After two days passed, a 10 metre high marble tower was constructed in the centre of the village square.

“Hmm, it turned out better than I thought.”

Ark looked at the brilliant finished tower with satisfaction. Then he gave the raccoons new commands.

“Now I want these letters carved on the surface of the tower.”

‘Indeed.....’

Dissatisfaction appeared on the raccoons' faces at Ark's order. They thought that it would definitely be an advertisement for Ark's store. But confusion spread over the raccoons' faces after receiving the phrases.

"Eh? T-this.....?"

"That's the phrases I want carved on the tower."

When Ark smiled and spoke, the raccoons looked at him with uncontrollable emotions in their eyes. Then they spoke in an apologetic tone.

"To even consider this idea....."

"Without knowing about Ark's idea, we selfishly....."

"Stop talking and start working instead. Please put off all other projects and complete this tower as quickly as possible."

The embarrassed Ark turned his head and said.

"Yes, Ark-nim!"

Since then, the raccoons worked 100 times faster and swung their hammers like crazy. Without any more complaints, it was possible to carve the words on the tower in just one day.

'It is only 70% complete but it isn't necessary to wait until it is completed to show it.'

"Now, gather the residents in the square. We will reveal the tower!"

Ark immediately called the residents to the square. While work on the tower had been ongoing, it had been covered with a tent. Thus the residents didn't know anything about the tower. And finally the tent was pulled down.

"What? This tower is?"

"Eh? The words recorded there.....?"

“Oh, that is.....!”

Exclamations fell from the residents’ mouths after they saw the tower.

Victims of the Lancel Battle Remembrance Memorial

The residents who didn’t regret sacrificing their lives for Lancel. It was only thanks to them that it was possible to protect Lancel village. They are the true heroes of the battle. We’re alive thanks to their sacrifice so we should not forget their names. Their names are carved on this monument and their descendants should tell any visitors to this place about their courage and sacrifice.

Yes, the tower Ark built in the centre of the square was a memorial. The names of the 90 victims from the battle were carved onto the memorial.

‘The victims can’t be repaid with just this but.....’

The victims in this battle had weighed on Ark’s mind. If he had countermeasures for the suicide squad beforehand then so many victims wouldn’t have died. Of course Ark couldn’t predict every situation but the fact that NPCs he was acquaintances with were dead was heartbreaking. Since it was a virtual reality game, there was little difference from grieving in real life.

‘Can I do anything for them?’

He was thinking this. Even though Galen gave compensation to the families of the victims, Ark also wanted to do something for them. And he thought of the memorial after taking over the reconstruction. He wanted to give a small consolation to the victim’s family and friends.

‘Seeing this for the first time is embarrassing.....’

Ark scratched his head as he looked at the memorial. Suddenly the teary residents mobbed him.

“Thank you Ark-nim!”

“These guys.....I’m really proud when thinking that they protected a nice village like this!”

“We are proud of them too!”

The residents spoke in teary voices. There was a ringing sound and an information window appeared in front of Ark.

-You have built a memorial in Lancel village.

You have completed the memorial in memory of the resident who sacrificed their lives in the battle. The memorial will be a source of comfort to many residents who have lost their family. With the names of the people who bravely sacrificed their lives to defend Lancel village carved on the memorial, all their descendants will be able to feel pride whenever they see the memorial.

* Bond among the village residents increased by 50%.

(When specific events occur in the village, the bond will either increase or decrease depending on the solution. When the bond is high, it will have a significant effect on the town’s satisfaction, harmony and even development. In addition, a drop in this value will increase the number of disagreements among residents.)

-Your degree of intimacy with the residents increased with the completion of the memorial.

<Intimacy +20%>

* Your intimacy with the village residents has increased over 100% and you’ve reached ‘Respected’ status. The ‘Respected’ status is the best evidence of a close relationship with NPCs. If a ‘Respected’ person requests something from the NPC, they will absolutely not refuse even if it is illegal or they have to sacrifice their lives. If you have the respect of the residents then everything is possible.

‘One part is over.’

Thanks to the completion of the memorial, the bond between residents and even his intimacy with them had increased. But the biggest effect of the memorial was the bright expressions on the faces of the residents. Thus his uncomfortable feeling was shaken off after the construction of the memorial. Despite the reconstruction project, there was still one major problem.

‘I’ve succeeded in making visitors concentrate on Ark’s store. I also feel better after building the memorial. But I’ve realized a huge problem thanks to Jewel’s group. The utmost priority is to secure the safety. Until now he thought it was 100% safe to leave his assets in a NPC village.....’

To be honest, there had been no cases of users attacking an NPC village until Jewel’s group. However, such a thing actually happened. And thanks to it being broadcasted on the TV, all users knew about it. The broadcast wasn’t small and the ripples of it would spread throughout New World. New World had a huge number of chaotic users. In order to oppose the chaotic users, hunter guilds and guards were gradually organized. Jewel’s attack on Lancel made them realize that it was possible to attack NPC villages. That meant Lancel village was exposed to chaotic users.

‘And all my assets are tied up in Lancel.’

He had Ark’s store and also the shares of Lancel. It was an enormous amount of money. What would happen if other thieves attacked and captured it? No matter how much money he earned, he would just become a beggar. Of course, it wasn’t easy for chaotic users to attack a village. There were many reasons why but the penalty caused by dying to guards wasn’t a joke. In order to attack a village, a minimum of hundreds of personnel was required which wasn’t easy to gather for chaotic users. But the largest reason was that there was no huge benefit to attacking a NPC village. Even if 10,000 gold was available, they would only be able to loot 10% of it. But that was different if there was a store managed by a user in the village. If certain conditions were met then it was possible to steal 100% of a user’s property. Even if there was a huge penalty, that target would present a challenge for chaotic users.

‘Having a store in a small village is a problem.’

Ark sighed.

‘Such things won’t happen easily but it could.....’

And even if other thieves didn’t move, there was still Jewel’s group. Even if the attack failed, those guys wouldn’t leave easily. With Jewel and Duke as their leaders, there was no guarantee they wouldn’t attack Lancel again.

‘Fortunately, the Letter Movement tower is now completed. If something happens then we can get support troops from Jackson and Giran. But the number of people that can move using the magic tower is subject to restrictions. The Lancel magic tower isn’t huge so it can only move 100 people. And if affected by Self-destruct then it might not function properly.’

In fact, Ark had only been able to protect the magic tower and Ark’s store this time thanks to Shambala’s information. If they were attacked without prior notice then it wouldn’t be possible to call for support troops. He was severely worried about those few things. But he couldn’t get rid of his store and shares and run away.

‘Then the only remaining way is to raise Lancel’s defences!’

Yes, if their defense was increased then the problem would be settled. Once again, there were almost no stores managed by a user in a small NPC village. User-run stores were more common in large cities like Giran, Jackson or Selebrid. And enormous profit could be gained when looting a user’s store. If chaotic users occupied a large city then they could quickly become game tycoons. But there were two reasons why chaotic users didn’t do that. The first reason was that large amounts of troops resided in a large city. The number and level of regular troops stationed at large cities was also set at 10% higher than the users. Users couldn’t easily attack. And the second reason was the large number of users gathered in major cities. The level and number of users who gathered in large cities was completely different from Lancel. There

were tens of thousands of people! If anyone tried to attack then the users would step on them.

‘Lancel is a free village. It belongs to Jackson but doesn’t have to pay them taxes. While they can send support troops, regular troops can’t be stationed there. And there was no merit for tens of thousands of users to flock to the village. There is one last way method to try.’

Ark thought for a while before trying out one last method. The last stage of the reconstruction business is to raise the defences of Lancel! If it went as planned then he didn’t have to worry about the security of Lancel village anymore!

‘The security measures are necessary to prevent the village residents from being sacrificed again. Yes, the security measures are indispensable to save my assets and prevent the loss of NPCs. And....it won’t be easy but it is possible!’

Thus Ark immediately initiated his plan.

Act 8: Lancel’s Security Measures

“Is everybody gathered?”

“Can’t you tell just by looking? How can you ask such a stupid question?”

Shambala, Bread and Redian turned towards Ark as Redian declared sharply. The three people were still hanging around Lancel village. Ark had gathered those three people in one place was to discuss the defense of Lancel village. The three of them had stayed in the village because they were all busy in their own way. Bread’s dream had been achieved and he had fun hunting with the wolves, so he was staying in this place for a while. Redian was also going around the mountain with the Meow gathering magic ingredients. And Shambala.....was currently preoccupied restoring the Eastern Nation branch in Lancel village. Of

course, Ark had also been busy with Lancel's reconstruction project. Despite being in the same town, they hadn't seen each other until Ark organized a meeting.

"Why did you make us come here?"

"A request?"

Shambala, Bread and Redian looked disgruntled as they muttered.

"Do you have some ulterior purpose again?"

"Don't you know this is urgent? Now please sit down."

Ark requested. While Shambala had known Ark for longer, Bread and Redian also somewhat knew him. When Ark requested the three of them had quickly gathered. If he acted like this then it must be serious. Then Ark bowed his head and said in a serious voice.

"It's not like that. This is absolutely necessary for the sake of Lancel village."

".....I will listen."

Ark's serious attitude had Bread sitting down. Once they all sat, Ark organized his thoughts before speaking.

"You guys can probably approximately guess this. Even though Jewel's attack was presently, Lancel village still can't be considered safe. There is a high probability that Jewel's group will attack Lancel again once they get out of jail. If they don't give up then one day those guys will win."

"Well, that...."

Bread scratched his head and nodded. Users could resurrect 24 hours after they died. So users were like immortal people in New World! Meanwhile NPCs only had one life. If they died it was the end. Unless the users abandoned New World, a war of attrition of NPCs against users would eventually end with the users' victory. Jewel's

group being killed by the guards and put into jail had prevented the war of attrition for the moment. But Jewel's group would only be in jail for several months. And Ark guessed that there was a 99% chance they would invade Lancel again after getting out of jail.

"It certainly is possible. Because Raiden and Jewel are like revengeful leeches."

"But we can't stay here forever."

"Certainly....."

Bread, Redian and Shambala nodded with heavy expressions.

"That's why I wanted to discuss the problem with you."

Ark said as he looked at the three people.

"In the meantime I've been thinking about a way to block the enemy but I can't come to a resolution. There is an essential part required to resolve this problem."

"An essential part?"

"That users aren't able to attack Lancel, no to make them recognize that Lancel shouldn't be attacked."

"That would be good but such a thing is impossible."

"No, it is possible. If you help me a little."

"What do you mean?"

"Yes, I have two requests for you."

Ark smiled and explained his plan. Ark had two purposes. The first was to defend Lancel from other bandit groups and the second was to stop Jewel's group when they were released from jail. And it would be impossible without Shambala, Bread, and Redian's help. After hearing

Ark's words Shambala, Bread and Redian's eyes became increasingly wide with amazement. Then they nodded and murmured.

"I never thought of such a method. But.....it is definitely a good way. If it is possible."

"I'll somehow make it possible. I have no desire to surrender Lancel village to them."

"Uh....."

Bread sighed and folded his arms. Then Shambala thought for a while before asking.

"Ark, do you understand? The first request is hard but somewhat possible. The second one is simple but requires a significant amount of money to accomplish."

"I know. Somehow I'll secure it."

"Then I can prepare my side without any problems."

Shambala nodded and left. It meant that he was cooperating with the request. Bread pondered for a moment before nodding.

"It's not a big deal so I'll try it. Okay. I can't give you a definite answer but I will try it."

"Okay, since it is decided then let's move immediately."

They all rose and proceeded with Ark's plan. Since the magic tower had been completed during the reconstruction, they each used it to move to their destination. Ark looked at the three lights flying in different directions and turned around.

'That's it, I don't have to worry about Redian and Shambala. The problem is what I requested of Bread..... Well, Bread had made up his mind and moved so it will somehow work out. Now there are two things left for me to resolve. First I have to entrust something to Sid. I can move once I've sent a letter to Sid.'

Ark returned to the store while thinking various things. When he arrived near the vicinity of the shop, he heard a sudden sound.

‘What the, this sound is?’

Ark who had been deep in his thoughts lifted his head like a startled dog. At the same time, 10 people poured out from his store and ran away. And something was thrown out after them. After it finally stopped rolling along the ground, he saw that it was Ulmeok. However, Ulmeok looked a bit strange. His face was dyed in various colours like he had been kicked there.

“What the? What’s going on?”

“Ah, Ark-nim!”

Ulmeok raised his head and came running to him.

“Ark-nim, save me!”

“Save you? What are you saying?”

“Sob, someone entered the store.....they mentioned Ark-nim.....then that person beat me up..... Sob sob sob, Sapjil hyung-nim is still being beaten.”

“What? Somebody dared interfere in my shop.....!”

Ark declared furiously and entered the store. Who would dare attack Ark’s store in Lancel village? Wasn’t that strange guy trying to die?

“What kind of bastard are you?”

“Did you call?”

Then a cynical voice could be heard inside the store. Ark turned his head in the direction he heard the voice. The man sitting on the corner was holding down Sapjil whose face had been flattened like a rice cake. Then he saw Ark and smiled.

.....10 minutes ago when the man appeared.

“Welcome.”

Sapjil and Ulmeok said as they prepared a sales pitch. After Ark’s event to promote the store was over, there were fewer users but there were still 10 guests browsing the products. At that moment a customer entered. After a long look around the store, he went up to Sapjil and asked.

“Where is Ark?”

“Huh? The President-nim?”

“President?”

The man then laughed and said.

“I didn’t know he was the president, but is he here? I need to speak to him.”

“.....What business do you need him for?”

“I came to pick up my goods.”

Sapjil’s expression changed 180 degrees at the man’s answer. Sapjil lost his welcoming attitude and muttered bluntly.

“Damn! What the? Is that the truth?”

“What? The truth?”

“That concept won’t work. Once dropped the items don’t belong to you anymore.”

Sapjil scratched his head before indicating towards a flyer on the wall.

“This will explain it all. Take a look at this!”

The man looked at the flyer Sapjil pointed to. The flyer had bright red letters on it.

Notification

First, thank you to all the customers looking around Ark's store. Recently unsavoury incidents have occurred so I wanted to inform you of this. There are those who willingly entered the Lancel war and dropped some equipment before finding it in this store and trying to claim it. But it is common sense that ownership of dropped equipment will belong to whoever picks it up. In addition, the people who bought the equipment from our store paid the normal price so ownership has transferred to them. Please read this note and don't claim anything ridiculous. If you hinder any sales then I will have to take legal action.

** Master White*

In fact, Ark had several guests try to claim ownership of an item they dropped. Ark had created a catalogue of equipment. After the Lancel battle, Ark and Radun had collect 251 items. But the problem was not all of those items belonged to Jewel's group. Despite the low probability of general users dropping items, some of those that participated did drop their equipment. Ark had included those equipment in the catalogue. So several users who participated in the battle found their equipment in the catalogue.

"Eh? I came here to buy new gloves but didn't this use to be mine?"

"That is the same as the armour I lost. I bought it from a luxury store in Selebrid so it even has my initials on it."

Like the flyer said, the dropped items belonged to the first person who picked it up. But the users felt it was unfair after discovering their equipment in the catalogue. In addition, some users hadn't signed up for the insurance so they had to purchase new equipment. So a lot of them became stubborn. Sapjil thought this man was such a user.

"Now do you understand? If you're not buying anything then please leave."

"No, I don't know what you're talking about but I came for my things."

"You're still saying the same thing? Then you're going to stay and be stubborn huh?"

"No, I mean....."

"No? Should I call the guards?"

The man was unable to endure Sapjil's words anymore. Something very dangerous broke in the man's head. The man's lips curled up on one side and he stepped forward.

"What the? Why is this stupid guy smirking?"

Sapjil muttered as he looked at the man. Suddenly a punch! Then an unexpected kick! The man started to beat Sapjil up using his hands and feet. He continued punching and kicking. Sapjil turned into a flattened rice cake in the blink of an eye.

"Hey, what are you doing to Hyung-nim?"

Ulmeok cried out with surprise and rushed towards the man. However, he just ended up being hit and was flung away outside the store. That was when Ark came back and found Ulmeok. He ran into the store and found the man. Then Ulmeok jumped out from behind Ark and shouted.

"It's that bastard! He kept on trying to claim his items....."

"You idiot, shut up!"

Ark who had been staring at the man with a vacant expression hurriedly shut Ulmeok up.

".....Teacher?"

There was only one person Ark called Teacher! Yes, the person was Lee Myung-ryong.....also known as Isyuram.

"Hmm, as expected the owner appears when the dog is hit. No, in this case it is the pig?"

Isyuram set the blubbering Sapjil down and laughed.

Sniffle, sniffle, sniffles.

“We apologize.”

“We were just doing what President-nim told us to.....”

Sapjil sat down and blubbered through swollen lips. He then whined as he saw his face which was various colours. As expected from Isyuram, being able to do that in only a few minutes. But he couldn't be impressed. How could he be when it was Ark's shop assistants being damaged? Yet he couldn't say a word

“So what? Do you have a complaint?”

“No. A shop assistant should be kind to the guests. Well done.”

.....Naturally he gave in. The other person was Isyuram. Other than JusticeMan and the rehabilitation brothers, Isyuram was one of the people Ark wouldn't touch. No, in this case Ark was no different from Sapjil and Ulmeok. If Isyuram had a problem with Ark then his face would easily become like Sapjil's. How could he look like that in front of Sapjil and Ulmeok?

“By the way, your punches and kicks are sharper than before. As expected of Teacher.”

“Eh? Is that so?”

‘T-that person.....!’

Sapjil and Ulmeok glared at Ark with betrayal. Then Roco who had just returned from learning from the ghost frowned and shouted.

“Oppa, what are you saying? Ajusshi, even if this was a misunderstanding that is still too much!”

‘Ohhh, Manager-nim!’

Sapjil and Ulmeok felt hopeful again at Roco's entrance. Then Isyuram looked at Roco before speaking absent-mindedly.

"Aha, I see. You're Roco?"

"H-how do you know that?"

"This is great. Ark talked a lot about you."

"Huh? Oppa did?"

"Yes, every time I meet Ark he talks proudly about his girlfriend. By the way, you're more beautiful than I expected. I'm envious!"

"Girlfriend? Beautiful?"

Roco closed her mouth and looked at Sapjil and Ulmeok. And she looked back at Isyuram before smiling and said.

"Hohoho, no, you didn't go that far..... It is natural if our shop assistant is unkind, right Isyuram oppa?"

"Ohh, you understand. I like it. Ark, your girlfriend is this pretty so what do you have to worry about?"

"Hohohoho."

"Hahahaha."

Sapjil and Ulmeok lost all their hope as the two continued laughing. And Ark also wanted to die. Even though Roco wasn't his girlfriend, Isyuram's chattering had inflated her hope. And that ajusshi was the one who ended up pouring cold water on the atmosphere of a first kiss. Ark finally interrupted Isyuram.

"Teacher, let's go to the site of the stolen goods."

In fact, Isyuram hadn't arrived in Lancel just to visit Ark. The reason Isyuram arranged to collect the stolen goods from Ark's store was because of the criminals. In New World the wanted criminals were

always watching him. However, not long ago Isyuram had captured a henchman so the criminals became scared and moved their hiding place. Therefore they couldn't connect to the game for one or two months. After listening to these circumstances, Ark had called Isyuram to Lancel. Since Ark was staying in Lancel for a bit, it was convenient to dispose of Isyuram's stolen goods.

"Yes, then let's go see the goods."

"Yes. Sapjil, Ulmeok, you two come with us as well."

Ark and Isyuram went to the warehouse with the pigs. When the door was opened a tremendous amount of japtem could be seen. It was japtem worth 10,000 gold!

"Huhu, these things are mine. Do you understand you pigs?"

"Yes yes, I understand."

Sapjil and Ulmeok instantly cringed as Isyuram addressed them. Ark looked at both of them before smiling wryly.

"Anyway it is good that you came. I have some business so I also have to go to Giran."

"Giran? What are you saying? Why do we need to go Giran?"

"Oh, you don't know? These stolen goods can't be disposed of in Lancel."

"Eh? Why not?"

"There aren't any stores here that are large enough purchase this many goods."

Once again, the reason why Isyuram wanted the stolen goods was to level up. The experience received with each transaction depended on how much profit was made. But there were no stores in the mountain village of Lancel that could buy this amount of goods. A store in Giran would be able to dispose of all the goods.

“After checking, the best place for a transaction like this is the merchant’s guild.”

Since Isyuram was an ignorant merchant, Ark had checked the best way to dispose of the stolen goods. As a result, he figured out that the best way was to use the merchant’s guild. If a merchant dealt directly with the merchant guild then there would be a 5% bonus applied to the experience. Furthermore, there were no restrictions on the amount of dealings with the merchant’s guild so he could receive 10,000 gold at once or even 100,000 gold. One problem was that the merchant’s guild would buy all the items at the average market price. In some cases, the items would be sold for a loss instead if the price had gone up. But in terms of experience, it was most efficient to deal with the merchant’s guild. In addition, various titles, quests or special skills were often given to merchants who dealt with the merchant’s guild.

“Oh, really?”

Isyuram nodded his head. Despite being a merchant over level 200, Isyuram knew almost nothing about trading. He had started from level 150 and gained 80 levels but that was from hunting not trading. It was unprecedented in New World for there to be such an ignorant merchant of this level.

“By the way, how are we going to move all these things to Giran?”

Isyuram looked at the stacked items and muttered. Shambala had needed a huge carriage to move all these japtem. But there was a simple method to carry japtem to Giran.

“Sapjil, Ulmeok, collect the japtem. Teacher, you should also empty your bags and collect the items.”

With Sapjil, Ulmeok and Isyuram, there were 3 merchants. One merchant had 6 bags with meant a total of 18 bags! When combines with Ark’s bag and Radun who had double capacity, there was a total of 21 bags. And when the same kind of item was put in a bag, it would stack up. Despite the actual volume or weight, it only took up one

space. Shambala was able to transport the high volume in the carriage because of this. Anyway, it was possible to pack the pile of japtem into the bags of the 4 people.

“Take care!”

They left with Roco seeing them off. But with the magic tower, the trade route only took 2 minutes to travel. While the Letter Movement was quite expensive, it was laughable to worry about some gold when they were carrying 10,000 gold worth of goods. The reconstruction projects were still ongoing so he couldn't leave Lancel village for long, and he also couldn't leave Roco alone in the store without Sapjil and Ulmeok. After flying to Giran using the Letter Movement, they went to the merchant's guild. The merchant's guild was the richest guild on the continent and was situated in the heart of Giran. When they entered the merchant's guild, a gold ornamented NPC approached with a professional smile.

“What service were you after today?”

The clerk indicated towards booths in 10 different areas.

“As you can see, the merchant's guild buys and sells a variety of goods. We also have the local specialties from most areas. If you are a professional merchant then you can also request something from the guild.”

“We wanted to dispose of some goods.”

“Then please follow me.”

The clerk guided Ark's group towards a booth. Then he pointed to a big basket and said.

“You can put the things you want to dispose of in there. Then I'll appraise it and tell you the possible purchase price.”

“Huh? But.....”

Ark hesitated while looking at the basket and the clerk seemed to know what he was thinking.

“Ah, if you don’t like the price then you don’t have to accept the deal.”

“No, it’s just will everything fit into the basket?”

“Huh? Ah, you mean..... Hahaha, you don’t have to worry about that. This basket has a special magic which will miniaturize the items.”

“Well, if you say so..... Radun.”

Ssak ssak ssak, ssak ssak ssak ssak!

At Ark’s command, Radun spat out the items into the basket. All the japtem were thrown up! When Ark took out the items in his bag, there was a considerable amount of japtem. But like the clerk said, once the items entered the basket they shrank into small boxes 1/100th of their size. Then the clerk laughed. Yes, he was laughing at their expressions after seeing the items being shrunk in the basket. However his expression became increasingly puzzled as Isyuram, Sapjil and Ulmeok opened their 18 bags and poured out more items.

“You want to dispose of everything in the bag?”

“Yes why?”

Isyuram answered while holding a bag upside down.

“W-wait a minute! That.....”

The japtem that had been reduced to 1/100th of their size inside the basket started vibrating and shaking before exploding like popcorn. The japtem returned to its original size and burst out of the basket like a volcano. The surrounding booths were also swallowed up in a flood of japtem. The japtem had gone beyond the limit capacity of the magic basket. A flood of japtem! The eyes of the surrounding NPCs widened after seeing all the japtem.

“Ah, so that’s why.....”

Ark scratched his head with an awkward expression and murmured. The clerk who had been buried by the wave of japtem crawled out and stuttered.

“Y-you want to dispose of all of this?”

“Yes, is that a problem?”

“Ah, no. Bring the branch chief right now!”

Another salesman ran up to the 2nd floor. After a while, a middle aged man ran down towards them. Then his mouth dropped open as he saw the mountain of japtem. Despite his surprise, he gave a business like smile and handed over a business card.

“I am the chief of the Giran branch of the merchant’s guild. Do you want to sell all of this at our guild?”

“Yes, can you calculate it right now?”

“Of course. Hey, what are you doing? Start organizing it right away!”

After the shout, the salesman who had been standing around stupidly gathered around the items. Then one salesman approached while wringing both his hands.

“This will take a bit of time to finish. You can go to that room and have a drink while waiting.”

As expected from the merchant’s guild. Their attitudes completely changed when it came to money. It was natural that the NPCs reacted like this. Merchants received experience through transactions. And that system wasn’t only applied to the users. NPC merchants also gained experienced through transactions. So a big customer was a chance for the NPC to grow. Thanks to that, Ark’s group received VIP treatment from the branch chief. After around 10 minutes?

The previous clerk which served them approached. He looked at the group and abruptly said.

“All the items cost 11,028 gold. Is this price okay?”

Isyuram sneakily glanced at Ark. His eyes asked if he should sell it at that price.

‘The amount is higher than I expected. Teacher’s profession is merchant so he will absolutely receive an advantage with big transactions.’

“Yes, we will sell all of it.”

Isyuram replied immediately after Ark nodded. Then the clerk hesitated as someone whispered something to him. His expression turned embarrassed and he spoke with an uneasy voice.

“I’m sorry but there seems to be a problem after our shop assistant investigated the items. I’m sorry to say this but the stolen goods..... It is normal to confirm it first before any deals can take place.....”

Isyuram became confused by the clerk’s words. But Ark just laughed and handed some documents over to the clerk.

Warranty

This warranty guarantees that there are no legal problems with any of the items listed. 50 silk fabrics, 120 crystals, 300 corals.....and so on.

Isabel, representative of Seutandal

Once again, these were stolen goods from Seutandal. It was okay with some general stores but the merchant’s guild had a strict policy against stolen goods. Of course, there was a 80~90% chance they would still sell it but it was possible to cut the price by 50%. So Ark had received the warranty from Isabel beforehand. The guarantor was the Seutandal representative Isabel! Even the stubborn merchant’s guild wouldn’t be able to negotiate any more.

“Perfect! This is perfect. I understand. I’ll pay the price immediately!”

Now that the anxiety about stolen goods was eased, the clerk’s face relaxed and he rushed off to get the money. Then the branch chief

appeared from the vault with the clerk carrying some money bags. He handed over five 2,000 gold bags, one 1,000 gold bag and the change of 28 gold..... It was a tremendous amount of money for the japtem. Isyuram's eyes widened as he saw the amount of money.

-The deal has been successfully completed!
-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.
-Your level has risen.....

It was 11,029 gold in one deal! Besides 11,029 gold was a 100% net profit. Yes, that was the point of this deal. The experience the merchant got was decided by the net profit. The more net profit was gained, the more additional experience would be applied. For example, if a deal consisting of 100 gold gained a net profit of 100, it would equal to 200 gold and 300 experience would be applied. That's why a merchant's capabilities were highly appreciated. 11,028 gold meant constant experience. This was the reason why a merchant's level could be one of the easiest or most difficult to raise. And thanks to trading with the merchant's guild, he received an extra 5% experience. When a warrior hunted, they received an experience penalty when there was a level difference. That's why 9 levels was the maximum a warrior could gain from a battle. But that penalty didn't exist for the merchants. Therefore Isyuram's level rose in units of 10.

"20, 30, 40, 50.....heok, 64! 64 levels at once.....!"

Isyuram's eyes rolled like crazy as he saw the messages. Whether reality or the game, money was still the best. This was 64 levels! It was an unbelievable amount.

"I struggled so much before....."

Isyuram muttered with bemusement. When Isyuram had arrived at the festival he was level 230. After joining the criminals, he had died so much that he lost 10 levels. But with one deal he gained back six times what he lost. It was fortunate that he had the information about

Seutandal's stolen goods and that he followed Ark's advice about how to dispose of them.

"A-Ark..... I'm really impressed.....!"

Isyuram stuttered as he struggled to express his thoughts.

"It is a really good deal."

Ark smiled warmly as he spoke. While he couldn't see the messages, he had seen the continuous cross marks over Isyuram's head. Isyuram's level had risen a lot thanks to the big deal. That also made him feel good. After thinking for a while, the branch chief had a new proposal.

"It is unusual for the representative of Seutandal to give a warranty and to obtain so many stolen goods. Usually it is a reward if the merchant has done some big service during a war, so it is evidence of the merchant's bravery on the battlefield."

In fact, it was 100% luck that he obtained the stolen goods. But Isyuram couldn't say that so he replied ambiguously.

"That's....."

"In a sense, a merchant is an occupation which risks its life more than a warrior. But these days the merchants are lazy and they have no meaning of the true soul of a merchant. Yet I can somehow feel the true soul of a warrior from Isyuram-nim? I don't understand why but it really feels different."

"Well, you don't have to go that far....."

Isyuram scratched his head awkwardly. The chief then said.

"So would you like try going to that area?"

"That area?"

"Yes. Actually, there is a wealthy merchant I know who retired there 10 years ago. Kuronil participated in the battlefield during the peak of the

war between the Three Kingdoms so he has gained considerable property. Before Nagaran was opened, it was the battlefield between the Three Kingdoms. So the merchant Kuronil has unparalleled influence in Nagaran. With his obsession with money, he never hesitated to jump onto the battlefield to deliver an assortment of potions and weapons to the soldiers. But Kuronil is now retired and lives on the outskirts of Nagaran. I've heard that he is looking for a successor with considerable experience on the battlefield. So Kuronil requested one thing from the merchant's guild. They wanted us to find any merchants who could run into a dragon's mouth."

"Then you mean.....?"

"Yes, if it is Isyuram-nim who managed to obtain the stolen goods then it is possible for you to become his successor..... Do you want to try meeting him? If you want then I will give you a letter of recommendation. Of course, you won't automatically become his successor even with my letter of recommendation. So far hundreds of merchants have visited but they've all be eliminated. If you are willing to challenge it then I'll be happy to write you the recommendation."

At the same time, an information window appeared in front of Isyuram.

-Wealthy Retired Merchant Kuronil

You've acquired information about the wealthy retired merchant from the branch chief of Giran's merchant's guild. Kuronil is a merchant who gained considerable fame on the battlefield in Nagaran. Despite having the body of a merchant, he developed special technique to survive on the battlefield and is looking for a successor to pass on those techniques. If a merchant with considerable knowledge and experience with the battlefield is recognized by him, it will be possible to learn those techniques.

<Difficulty: A+>

<Quest Restriction: Level 300 or more Merchant. Quest can only be performed after successfully completing 1 deal worth 5,000 gold or

more. Letter of Recommendation from a branch chief of the merchant's guild is needed>

"Eh?"

Isyuram's eyes widened as he looked at the information window. He then explained to the oblivious Ark the contents of the information window. Then Ark's eyes flashed and he said.

"Accept it. No matter what!"

"Eh? Huh? Ah, understood. Yes. I'll give it a shot."

Isyuram was scared into accepting the quest. The reason Ark pushed Isyuram to accept was because the quest smelt like a change profession quest. Wasn't it natural for a merchant to have various 2nd stage profession?

"Good choice. That person is living in the Hamong castle in Nagaran. If you see him then show him my recommendation letter. Good luck."

After Isyuram received the letter of recommendation, they exited the merchant's guild.

"Hmm, that is a little crazy. Anyway, I have nothing to do now so it works out well. Did he say Hamong castle in Nagaran? Do you know where that is?"

"It is a war zone."

"War zone?"

"Yes, users are allowed to kill each other in that area. For a merchant to go there....."

Ark thought for a moment before saying.

"I have to go there too so would you like to go together?"

"Why do you need to go there?"

“The explanation is a little long.....”

“Hmmm, no, I’ll go by myself. I don’t know anything about the war zone but I’ll be too embarrassed if I have to go with you. ThThen let’s part here. Give my regards to Roco.”

Isyuram handed half of the 11,028 gold which was 5,514 gold to Ark. Then he added one gold and laughed.

“This is a tip. You should keep it and call it your lucky coin.”

Thus the stolen goods were finally settled after one month. However Ark still had some business in Giran. After sending Sapjil and Ulmeok back first, Ark entered the Magic Institute and asked for a meeting with Shannen.

“Ark, welcome!”

After a while, Shannen welcomed Ark with a pleased expression.

“I’ve heard from the magician dispatched to Lancel that the magic tower has been completed. It is good that you managed to stop the thieves from attacking the village. As a regular member of the Magic Institute, I am proud of you. Yes, was there a reason you wanted to talk to me today?”

“I wanted to ask a favour.”

“A favour? If it is from you then I’ll have to accept. What is it?”

Ark hesitated for a bit before finally asking Shannen.

“I would like to meet with the Grand Master of the Magic Institute. Is that possible?”

Ttukttuk, ttukttuk, ttukttuk!

“Ark-nim, the landscaping work around the square has been completed.”

“The work on the building expansion has been completed.”

“The extension on the new road is complete.”

“Hrmm.....”

Ark received the information from the raccoons and surveyed the scene. With the raccoons working day and night in two shifts, the current completion rate of the reconstruction was 98%. The building repairs, new construction projects, new roads and landscaping were completed. The remaining thing left was the outer paint on the buildings.

‘It definitely looks better than before.’

There was a satisfied smile on Ark’s face. The most satisfactory part was that he could see Ark’s store from wherever he looked in the village. It was the design which Hanson put his heart and soul into and it also showcased Ark’s store. With the land readjustment, the atmosphere of Lancel village had completely changed by 180 degrees. However it didn’t give off the feel of a sophisticated city. The goal of Hanson’s new plan for Lancel was ‘simple’ with variety. Lancel was more like a neat amusement park than a city and Hanson’s vision of a new town had been born. The NPCs were also quite satisfied thanks to the memorial.

‘Now there’s only one problem left.....’

Ark sat down next to a flower bed and thought about yesterday. After meeting with Shannen of the Magic Institute in Giran yesterday, he had asked for a meeting with the Grandmaster. He was the leader of the Magic Institute, one of the 3 largest guilds on the continent! A regular user couldn’t even imagine meeting the Grandmaster but Ark was a regular member of the Magic Institute. 10 minutes after Ark asked and using a long distance spirit communication magic, Ark was able to have a meeting with the Grandmaster of the Magic Institute. The reason Ark asked for a meeting was to discuss the security measures for Lancel village. The help of the Magic Institute was necessary for that. Ark used all of his eloquence to convince the Grandmaster.

“Your request can’t be lightly accepted. Despite its rapid growth, Lancel village is still just a small mountain village. The future is unknown but there is no benefit for the Magic Institute at the moment.”

‘Is it impossible as I expected?’

A sigh naturally emerged from Ark’s mouth. However it wasn’t possible for him to give up. Ark was thinking when the Grandmaster opened his mouth.

“But the growth of the Magic Institute can’t be compared to before thanks to Magaro’s research materials that you brought. If I refuse this request then it would impact on the honour of the Magic Institute. It is unprecedented but as the Grandmaster, I will accept this request.”

‘It’s a success!’

Ark’s eyes flashed at the Grandmaster’s words. It was worth all that suffering to complete Magaro’s quest. Thus Ark received what he desired from the meeting with the Magic Institute. But Ark’s plan was only 33% successful. For Ark’s plan to be 100% successful, he required the cooperation of the warrior’s guild and the merchant’s guild. Of course, his meeting with the Grandmaster had turned out favourably but he had also prepared a separate plan.

“Is it possible to let me speak with the Grandmasters of the warrior’s guild and merchant’s guild?”

“.....That is a difficult request.”

The Grandmaster murmured in an astounded voice. Shannen who was also listening sent Ark an embarrassed glance. The Magic Institute had a competitive relationship with the warrior’s guild and the merchant’s guild. Ark telling the Grandmaster that he wanted to speak with the two other guilds was like him saying he wanted to ask a favour from their competitors. Of course Ark already knew this. Ark shamelessly continued talking.

“Wouldn’t having more help be better?”

“.....Hu, I don't know whether you're ignorant or brave. Anyway I can't grant your request. But you don't need to ask that from me.”

“Huh? What does that mean.....?”

“If you don't know the reason then you really are ignorant.”

The Grandmaster said before he broke the spirit communication.

‘What on earth does he mean?’

Ark continued to think about the Grandmaster's words but he couldn't understand.

‘Anyway, I have the cooperation of the Magic Institute.....’

Ark was thinking that when something interrupted him.

Sweeeeeeeek!

A huge light flew towards Lancel village. It was a giant-sized light that was just like a comet. The light hit the upper part of the magic tower and caused an intense white spark.

“That light is.....they've come!”

Ark jumped up and ran towards the magic tower. When he arrived at the magic tower, the users who had witnessed the light were already gathered. The size of the light depended on how many people were moved using the Letter Movement. The size of that light meant at least a dozen users were moved. The Letter Movement was so expensive so how would move that many people to Lancel village? The users flocked to the magic tower because of this. Then the doors of the magic tower opened and a bunch of people poured out. The users who looked at them shouted in an awestruck voice.

“Eh, those people are.....?”

“The Magic Institute! They're magicians of the Magic Institute!”

“Fire, ice, wind and earth, the magicians of the 4 attributes are gathered!”

“Why are the magicians here? Aren’t the 4 attribute magicians’ guards of the Magic Institute?”

Yes, there were four magicians from the Magic Institute wearing various colours indicating their attribute. The emblem of the Magic Institute was sewn in brilliant gold thread on their chests. The users started murmuring noisily among themselves. Then the leader of the magicians discovered Ark and approached.

“Ark-nim? Nice to meet you. According to Ark’s request, I am Gurana from the Magic Institute here to establish a branch in Lancel. I am pleased to be here.”

“Eek? Lancel branch of the Magic Institute?”

“The Magic Institute is creating a branch in Lancel?”

The users gaped with surprise. Yes, this was the reason why Ark had asked to meet with the Grandmaster of the Magic Institute. And this was the plan Ark devised to improve the defense of Lancel village. A branch of one of the three most powerful guilds on the continent was being established in Lancel. If the branch was established then guards from the guild would have to reside in Lancel and Lancel’s defense would be forced to increase. But that wasn’t the only benefit of having a branch of the Magic Institute. The Magic Institute was one of the highest ranking guilds! The number of NPCs that belonged to it in the continent numbered in the thousands! Among the members of the Magic Institute, 30% of them were users. If the Magic Institute opened in Lancel then numerous users and NPCs would flock to Lancel. It would have tremendous economic impact. And those NPCs and users would increase Lancel’s defense! In other words, they would be Lancel’s defense.

‘If only one guild has such enormous effect then what would happen if I attract three?’

That was Ark's final goal. Among the regular members of the warrior's guild, only four of them were users and one of them was Bread! Ark had asked Bread to meet with the Grandmaster of the warrior's guild to persuade him. In addition, Sid was sent to the merchant's guild. After his achievements in Nagaran, Sid had become a member of the merchant's guild.

'But is it impossible to attract the three guilds?'

If Bread and Sid succeeded then the warrior and merchant's guild representatives should've arrived before the Magic Institute. Since there was no contact before the Magic Institute arrived, he could only think that it had failed.

'Well, the economic effects of the Magic Institute should be sufficient for Lancel's defense.....'

Ark had just given up when it happened.

"Look there! There is another huge light!"

Ark hurriedly lifted his eyes at someone's voice. Then two comets of light flying from different directions hit the magic tower.

Sweeeeeeeek, kwa kwa kwa kwang! Sweeeeeeeek, kwa kwa kwa kwang!

The subsequent impact made the magic tower shake and wobble. Then the sound of drums was heard from the magic tower and a cavalry appeared.

Dong, dong, dong, dong!

"Huck, isn't that the high ranking Knight's Division of the warrior's guild?"

"The Iron Armour Infantry is also following behind them!"

"That's not all. Those are carriages from the merchant's guild!"

"Impossible, all three guilds from the continent.....!"

It was the march of the three guilds! The scene completely shocked the users. At that moment, two people broke away from the guilds and approached Ark. They were Bread and Sid who Ark had sent to the guilds.

"Hahaha, Ark I'm back!"

"Ark-nim, I've come as well!"

"You succeeded!"

Ark shouted as he looked at the NPCs from the three guilds with disbelieving eyes. Then Bread scratched his head and said.

"That's the thing. I don't know why it worked. Just yesterday they were continuously refusing so I was just going to return. Then this morning they suddenly decided to depart for Lancel village."

"Eh? That happened with me as well.....?"

Sid and Bread then looked at each other and seemed to ask 'Who are you?' with their eyes. Then Gurana who had been standing next to Ark smiled and said.

"Oh, I forgot. This is a message from the Grandmaster to Ark-nim. 'The warrior's guild and merchant's guild are our rivals. You don't have to push them'. That is the message."

"Huh?"

Ark couldn't understand Gurana's words. But after connecting it to yesterday's talk, he was able to understand the situation.

'I didn't have to ask the merchant's guild and warrior's guild to attract all three guilds. The Magic Institute had a competitive relationship with the warrior's guild and the merchant's guild. The Grandmaster said I didn't have to push.'

Yes, the three guilds were rivals. If one side moved forward even a little bit then the other two would also move forward. The warrior's guild

and merchant's guild didn't feel a need to establish a branch in Lancel village. But after they discovered that the Magic Institute was establishing a branch here, they began to believe that they needed to also build branches in Lancel. Perhaps the Grandmaster of the Magic Institute even purposely leaked his plan to the other two guilds.

'As expected from the Grandmaster of the Magic Institute, he really isn't ordinary.'

"Tell the Grandmaster thank you."

Ark replied with a smile. Then there was a dinging sound and the quest information window appeared.

-The three main guilds on the continent have decided to build branches in Lancel village.

The three guilds represent the top guilds in New World. Having the three guilds in Lancel village will improve the quality and fame of the village, which will play a crucial role in its growth into a city.

*The establishment of the three guilds in Lancel village has increased the capabilities of Lancel village.

Magic Institute: Civilization +500, Development Speed +200

Warrior's Guild: Armament +500, Development Speed +200

Merchant's Guild: Commerce +500, Development Speed +200

-The sub quest <Lancel's Reconstruction Project> has been completed.

The reconstruction has Lancel village that received damage from the war has been completed.

* Quest progress result: 230% achieved

'230% achievement rate!'

Thanks to the successfully invitation of the 3 guilds, his progress had increased by 130% in one leap!

“I’d like to meet the person in charge of the village!”

The leader of the warrior’s guild and merchant’s guild went to the front of the group and shouted. Since Galen was currently absent, Ark stepped forward since he was in charge of the reconstruction project. Then a flash of light flew from the south and the magic tower shook again.

‘What the? There is still someone coming?’

When Ark looked at the magic tower, a crowd of people soon appeared. Ark’s eyes widened as he saw the young man leading the group.

‘Heok, t-that person is?’

Act 9: Start of the Real Battle

“Who is that person?”

“Looking at the attire doesn’t he seem to be a nobleman?”

“I think I’ve seen those knights somewhere before.”

The users around the magic tower murmured. They were looking at the 10 knights who walked out of the magic tower. The leader of the knight procession wore shining armour. And at the centre of the group was a young man wearing white clothing who approached Ark. The first person to react to the young man’s appearance was the manager of the warrior’s guild branch. The branch manager confirmed the sentences inscribed on the youth’s clothing and moved back one step. He moved his clenched fist to his chest and shouted.

“Everyone line up, show respect to the Lord of Jackson!”

The NPCs from the merchant's guild and the Magic Institute also followed his example. Yes, the young man who appeared from the magic tower was Lord Jackson.

"L-Lord-nim?"

"Ark, it's been a while."

The Lord's white cape fluttered as he ran up to Ark and grasped his hand.

"How long as it been?"

"Why is Lord-nim here.....?"

Ark stuttered as he looked at Lord Jackson and the knights with confused eyes. Apart from the Lord, he was also acquaintances with all the knights. They were Cross and the knights who participated in the Silvana siege. When they noticed Ark's attention, they gave him a small smile and nodded. Why had they come all this way to Lancel village? The Lord who had become a dignified youth smiled and answered his question.

"Of course we came here because of you."

"Me?"

The Lord tilted his head at Ark's befuddlement.

"What's with this reaction? You really don't know anything about it?"

"Don't know? What are you talking about?"

"Hah. Galen, what's going on?"

'Galen?'

Ark followed the Lord's gaze. Then a person who had been hiding behind the knights awkwardly came forward. It was Galen who had disappeared after leaving the reconstruction project to Ark.

"Galen, why are you with the Lord.....?"

Ark still couldn't grasp the situation at all. It wasn't just Ark. Standing near him were Bread, Sid and the three guilds. The village residents had also stopped their work and gathered around. Even the users gathered around the magic tower looked on with wondering expressions. Galen's face looked slightly apologetic before he said.

"I'm sorry. I didn't tell him in case it couldn't happen."

"Hmm, so you really don't know anything.

The Lord looked at Ark mischievously. After a brief moment, the Lord looked serious and said.

"Sir Ark, kneel and receive this Imperial Order from His Majesty the king!"

"Sir Ark? His Majesty's Imperial Order?"

"Do as he says."

Galen whispered in a low voice. Ark looked between Galen and the Lord before kneeling. Then the Lord pulled out a sword ornamented with Jewels before tapping it against Ark's shoulder and speaking in a loud voice.

"I am the Lord of Jackson, Haverstein the 2nd and I hereby bestow upon Ark a knighthood on behalf of His Majesty, the King of Schudenberg. You will also gain the title of Baronet and obtain the right to own a land. The Honourable Knight Ark has been granted the Lordship of Lancel village. Although there are some who opposed this decision, His Majesty the King of Schudenberg has decided. Then let all of these contents be applied to Sir Ark!"

'Honourable Knight? Baronet? Lord?' Then perhaps.....?"

Ark couldn't believe his ears. All of a sudden he had become knighted, received a baronet and became the Lord of Lancel? What on earth was

this? However, the Lord did not give him time to think. The young Lord pulled out a golden scroll, untied the silk ribbon and unrolled it.

“Sir Ark, receive the order from His Majesty.”

Ark received the scroll with a stupid face and stuttered.

“Baronet? Lord? What are you saying?”

After handing Ark the scroll, the young Lord immediately looked playful again. And he pointed to Galen and laughed.

“Ask your friend over here. He is the one who arranged everything.”

“Galen arranged this?”

“Yes, of course I helped a bit as well.”

“What does that mean.....?”

“Galen, everything is finished so shouldn’t you explain it now?”

“I understand.”

Galen laughed and approached Ark.

“I don’t know where to begin..... Hmm, yes there is no need for a long explanation so I’ll just say it. I’ve been thinking about it for a while but I finally realized after the village was attacked. You have a large presence among the residents.”

Galen said as he looked at Ark.

“It is natural. From the beginning, this village also died out until you helped us. And all the residents have found a new home in Lancel because of you. In other words, Lancel couldn’t exist without you. That also applies to this attack. If you weren’t here then we would’ve been destroyed by the thieves.”

‘Well, he’s not wrong.’

Ark shamelessly agreed. But he pretended to be humble when about the situation.

“You’re overpraising me. Certainly the residents of Lancel were collected by me. But are they able to rest here in unity because of Galen ajusshi? The residents of Lancel village are also indebted to Galen ajusshi for opening your heart to them.”

“That’s not true. I just manage the place. If it wasn’t for your existence then the beast clans, the ex-thieves and the Baran would never be able to live in unity. I’ve realized this clearly after the attack from the bandit group. So I decided that it will be best to entrust Lancel village to you. After the battle was over, I gathered the residents and revealed my intention.”

Galen pulled out a thick roll of paper. The roll of paper was stamped with the soles of a cat and dog, the palm of the raccoons, the signature of the people and so on. What was this? A cartoon? A code? A joke? Galen smiled at Ark’s doubtful look and said.

“This is the answer of the residents. They all signed that they are willing to entrust Lancel village to you.”

.....The soles and palms of the beast clans were their signatures. It seemed to pour cold water upon the serious atmosphere but he felt a pain in his chest at the sight. Then all the residents gathered here already knew about it? And they signed that they wanted to leave Lancel village to Ark? When Ark looked around the ex-thieves, Meow, Wolrang, raccoons and other residents scratched their heads with embarrassment and avoided his gaze. Galen had gone away for a while because of him. After the Lancel defensive war finished, Galen immediately visited the Lord Jackson. Then he explained everything that occurred in the village to the Lord. The threat of Lancel village closing, the movement of new settlers, making the village grow, the food crisis and finding the Sacred Soil and defending the village from thieves..... Then he showed the Lord the signatures of the residents who wanted Ark to be in charge of Lancel.

“This is a very fun talk.”

As one of Ark’s fans, the Lord Jackson happily accepted Galen’s request. Geographically Lancel belonged to the Jackson region, but since it was a pioneer village it wasn’t under the control of the Lord. And since it was a small village, it also didn’t need a Lord. But the words of the village residents changed that. How could he stop a free village from appointing a Lord? But Galen didn’t just want a Lord to be appointed, he wanted it to be acknowledged by the King. And to become an official lord, a noble rank was needed. So Galen had deliberately gone to Lord Jackson with the signatures. As an adoring fan of Ark, the Lord directly sent a letter to the King.

“His Majesty easily agreed. He hadn’t forgotten your achievement in bringing down Alan and the Ankh church. Of course, defeating the bandit group and having the signatures of the residents greatly helped.”

The young Lord placed his hand on Ark’s shoulder and said.

“Now, don’t you have an answer to give?”

“Huh?”

The young Lord pointed towards the gathered residents.

“You still haven’t given them an answer for their support. The King was the one who gave you a barony but they are the ones who appointed you as the Lord.”

Ark felt something warm in his chest at the young Lord’s words. It had been 1 year and 6 months since he first encountered Lancel village. In the meantime, Ark had experienced an amazing adventure while gathering the residents. That was why he built the memorial for the NPCs despite his money loving personality. Yes, it was already impossible to separate Ark from Lancel. Now Lancel had truly become Ark’s village. And he was chosen by the residents! Despite being NPCs in a game, Ark still recognized his feelings for them.

“.....I accept the Lordship.”

Ark answered as he released the bottled up emotions. There was a ringing sound and the information window appeared.

-You have acquired the 'Peerage Bestowment Certificate.'

The 'Peerage Bestowment Certificate' grants you the title 'Honour Knight' (Baronet) and you've gained a plot of land.

Foreigners in New World have an equal status to commoners. But sometimes a foreigner will have a big achievement within a kingdom and they will be given a chance to rise up in the nobility. Being granted a noble title has far more meaning than just a title. The increase in social status means the user's achievement has been recognized by the kingdom and it will have a significant impact on all future works.

<After becoming a nobleman, it is possible to freely enter any government office in the kingdom. In addition, you can meet directly with the Lords of each territory and if any nobility related quests are completed, it will be possible to ask for support from the guards of the village or city>

* After receiving a noble title bonus all stats will increase by 5.

* Fame has increase by 5,000.

* When completing a quest given by an NPC with a noble title, your status (Honour Knight: 100 people) will allow you to receive the support of the guards.

-You have gained the Lordship for the pioneer village Lancel.

You have been bestowed the Lordship of Lancel village by the Schudenberg King.

As the Lord, you can set the budget, invest in facilities and equipment and decided the management policies. In addition, you have the authority to issue store permits. Every 10 days 3% of the profit obtained from the territory will be given to the Lord as a monthly salary, the village shares will be increase by 5% and the upper limit increased to

25%.

<Special Rights: If the Lord's assets are used as collateral, 3% of the territory's public funds can be used as a loan. However if the loan is not paid with 45 days the assets will be seized, shares in the village will fall below 5% and the Lordship will be lost>

* Shares in Lancel village has increased by 5%.

* Upper limit of shares which can be owned increased to 25%.

Currently owned shares in Lancel village (Owned/Upper Limit): 9/25%

-You have learnt a new Lord's skill.

All official Lords have the chance to learn this skill. This skill is a crucial help in ruling the estate and developing it. While the effects of it is still low in its current state, one the skill gains more experience and levels then it will have a huge impact.

* Leadership (Lord Skill): This skill can increase your influence over the residents. When the leadership of the Lord is high, there will be an increase in yield of various products and the growth rate of the population will increase. It will also affect the morale of the troops if attacked by thieves or monsters. Leadership will increase every time display a good impact on the territory as the Lord. Thanks to the excess achievements of Lancel related quests and the amount of respect in the residents' hearts, 300 Leadership has been added.

<Leadership: 500 (+300)>

Currently Owned Territory Information Window

【Territory】	Lancel	【Rating】	C
【Classification】	Small Territory	【Number of Residents in Territory】	732 people
【Residents' Bond】	1280 (+ 640)	【Residents'	970

		Loyalty】	(Respected)
【Territory's Gross Income】	7,950 gold every 10 days	【Properties of the Current Territory】	49,780 gold
【Value of the Current Territory】	6480 (+ 2,730)	【Territory's Fame】	89,479
【Development】	2,840	【Development Speed】	2950 (+ 2,075)
【Commerce】	1892 (+ 500)	【Civilization】	1,435 (+500)
【Armament】	1,676 (+500)		
* Current effects applied to the territory			
【World Tree】 Development Speed +50%, Territory Value +50%, Chances of monsters attacking -50%, 'Resting' effect 【Magic Institute】 : Civilization +500, Development Speed +200 【Warrior's Guild】 : Armament +500, Development Speed +200 【Merchant's Guild】 : Commerce +500, Development Speed +200 【Memorial】 Bond +50%			
<Find New Settlers> quest has been updated.			
You have completed the <Find New Settlers> quest.			

Yes, the Lordship of Lancel village. It was the compensation for a quest which took 1 year and 6 months.

“Waaaaahhhhh!”

“Hooray Lord Ark!”

A huge cheer rang out after Ark accepted the Lordship. The raccoons popped up from the holes scattered around and cheered while the

Meow ran along the overpasses and shouted. The Wolrang also shook their tails with wild enthusiasm. The ex-thieves raised their hands in the air and cheered. They were.....now Ark's residents.

"Congratulations."

Then Gurana raised his hands over his head and lifted a finger. The dozens of magicians from the Magic Institute launched fireworks towards the sky. The magic fireworks dyed the sky in flashy lights. Then the warrior's guild raised their swords and shouted while the merchant's guild rocked their carriages and participated in the celebration. The three guilds started the inauguration celebration.

"I'm envious. I never received such enthusiastic cheers from my residents....."

The young Lord standing to one side grinned and muttered. Thus Ark became the Lord of Lancel village. Meanwhile the users just stared at Ark with confused expressions.

"Damn!"

The curse was spat out in the dark and damp area. The person leaning on the cold stone walls and cursing was Jewel.

"That Ark....."

Jewel murmured in a scratchy voice. Jewel was currently locked up in the Jackson dungeons after being killed by the Lancel guards. It was natural since attacking a NPC village was a crime. The leader of the attack was also Jewel. As the ringleader of the thieves, he received an enormous penalty of 4 months in jail. Users organizing a group to attack NPC villages could greatly disrupt the game balance so it received a huge punishment. Of course, Jewel had been prepared to receive the penalty. However, the penalty for his failure didn't end there. The most fatal problem was that Jewel's face had been broadcasted nationwide

through the TV. Thanks to that, Jewel's face was now stamped as a villain in the minds of millions of New World users. It would be impossible to play without a mask after he was released from jail. As soon as he knew this fact, Jewel had called the station to protest. However, New World's rule was 'anything disadvantageous to a user who committed a crime, or a 'chaotic' user cannot be penalized.' Therefore the broadcasting station had ignored his pleas. And there was no point since the video had already spread on the internet. But that wasn't the end of Jewel's unhappiness. Jewel, Duke and all the members stuck in jail had received a notice from Raiden stating a permanent ban. There was no need to explain the reason. If they accepted Jewel's group back then the Hermes alliance would just be branded as a 'villain' group.

"Dammit! Even if I could I wouldn't return to the guild now!"

Jewel punched the wall in anger. He ate and lived for the guild and now it resulted in eternal expulsion? So he felt anger at Ark and feelings of betrayal towards Raiden. Anyway, it was a fact that Jewel lost everything.

'Ark isn't an opponent that one person can deal with. The difference will become even larger while I'm trapped for 4 months. But now I'm even expelled from Hermes.....the chance to get revenge on Ark won't come any more. Even if being humiliated in this cell, wouldn't it be better to quit the game?'

Jewel sighed at the thought.

"No. 5003, you have a visitor!"

The voice of the guard could be heard through the dark passage.

"Visitor? Is it Raiden?"

Jewel raised his head. However the person who approached the cell window wasn't Raiden. The warrior was wearing a brown robe over metal armour and once he pushed back the robe it was an unknown user. There was a metallic sound as he moved back the hood and laughed after seeing Jewel's face.

"Is it because I saw you on TV? You look so familiar."

".....What the? Who are you? Did you come to see the face of a celebrity?"

"Hmm, you're quite sensitive. It is reasonable."

The man laughed and said.

"I came because I have a proposal."

"Proposal?"

"I've already checked you out. Jewel, a magician from the Hermes alliance. But isn't that old now? With this situation the Hermes alliance won't accept you anymore. Am I wrong?"

"Did you come just to say that?"

"You.....no, I came to scout you."

"What? Scout?"

Jewel looked at the man with stupid eyes. This bastard, what on earth was he saying? He wanted to scout Jewel after his face had been broadcasted on TV nationwide? Was he crazy?

"What the hell are you thinking?"

"Honestly, I have a lot of colleagues at your level. But I like your tenacity in chasing Ark that you even attacked a NPC village. I need colleagues like you who want to get revenge on Ark."

"Like me? Then....."

"Yes, I've also been insulted and beaten by Ark. Now my purpose in New World is to bring that guy to despair. Aren't you the same? I've almost finished the preparations for my revenge against Ark. I assure you. If you join me then you'll be able to achieve your purpose, there's no doubt. How about it? Do you want to take revenge with me?"

Jewel closed his mouth and looked at the man for a while. His identity was unknown. However, Jewel already had no place to return to. Yet there was a reason Jewel hadn't quit the game yet. His pride wouldn't let him quit the game when he hadn't achieved his revenge against Ark yet. If there was a chance to get revenged on Ark then he would even be willing to sign a contract with the devil. However.....

"My punishment is 4 months. I'll be no different from a low level user when released in 4 months."

"Then I'll break you out of jail."

"What?"

Jewel's eyes widened at the man's answer. Then the man said.

"Why are you so startled? You're the one who tried to annihilate a whole village."

"That is a mountain village but this place is different. It is the territory of a Lord. For such a thing to be possible....."

"Of course it is impossible if we attack this place like you did Lancel. But if it is just a jailbreak then it's possible. My organization already possesses that type of power. If the jailbreak fails then your penalty will increase but you have nothing more to lose. How about it? Would you like to try?"

The man said as he tried to tempt Jewel. He was unsure but the man smelled somewhat dangerous. However, a drowning person had no choice but to grab the vine even if it had thorns on it.

".....Okay."

The man's lip curled up at Jewel's answer. The man looked around for a bit before smiling pleasantly.

"Please wait. It will take a few days."

"Wait, what is your name?"

The man who started walking away flinched and stopped. Then he lifted his hood back onto his head and said in a low voice.

“Andel, I am Andel.”

“Phew, I’ve arranged a bit of it.”

Ark stretched his back and sighed. After becoming the Lord yesterday afternoon, everything had become hectic for Ark. After the celebration ceremony by the 3 guilds, Ark had been paraded around the village. Then the representatives of the residents gathered in the Town Hall and the celebration stretched on for 4 hours. But what really tired Ark out wasn’t the NPCs but the users. Ark had been really puzzled by the Lordship but the users watching had also been shocked. The users had often met the nobility but they never heard of user becoming a Lord outside of Nagaran. In addition, it was incomprehensible to the users about how Ark had taken part in the defensive war. Although many users took part in the Lancel war, none of them had seen Ark (because he had changed into Dark Wolf) so Ark’s inauguration as the Lord was completed unexpected. So throughout the parade the users had followed along in a cloud of confusion and continued asking questions. Thus he had escaped to the Town Hall after the parade.

‘Damn, now both Dark Wolf and Ark had become famous so it will be difficult to distinguish between them. Should I transform myself into a form other than Dark Wolf when wandering around?’

He was seriously worried about it. Anyway, the young Lord returned to his territory after the celebration was finished. Sid and Bread also became completely drunk and only disconnected at dawn. However, it was just the start of all of Ark’s work.

‘Damn, I didn’t know the work of a Lord would be so complicated.’

Ark complained as he looked at a pile of papers. Building the branches for the 3 guilds, processing the budget, settling the minor complaints of

the residents etc..... Despite being a small village with only 732 residents, the Lord still had a lot of work. Of course, this wasn't the first time Ark had been a Lord. But he had always intended to sell Silvana to Raiden so he had no interest in it. He also had the highly competent secretary Berami. Of course, in Lancel village there was also Galen. And Galen would still be handling tasks in Lancel when Ark was away. But Lancel village was Ark's territory. As the Lord, it was necessary to grasp the issues and learn how to process them.

'Lancel village is different from the territories in Nagaran. This territory only belongs to me. Lancel village is like an extension of my body. If Lancel dies then I will die. If Lancel is well then I am well!'

When he thought about this, it felt like his affection towards Lancel had increase by around a million times. Besides, the profit earned from being the Lord was enormous.

"Character information window!"

Character Name	Ark	Race	Human
Alignment	Good +500	Nobility Title	Baronet
Fame	7,985 (+500)	Level	383
Profession		Dark Soul	
Title		Cat Knight, Caretaker of the People, Jackson's Hero, Great Adventurer, Magic Institute Member, Seutandal's Hero	
Health	7190 (+475)	Mana	7380(+225)
Spiritual Power	956	Strength	757 (+58)
Agility	982 (+90)	Stamina	1222 (+45)

Wisdom	178 (+10)	Intelligence	1300 (+5)
Luck	172 (+60)	Flexibility	256
Art of Communication	78	Affection	89 (+10)
Resilience	468	Dark Fog	52
Special stat: Knowledge of Ancient Relics		153	
* Equipment item effects			
Guardian Armour of the Merpeople (Armour): Water Attribute Resistance +100%, Penalty based on water is nullified.			
Cat Paws (Gloves): Attack Speed +10%, Agility +15, Critical Hit +10%			
Raccoons Pith (Helmet): Agility + 10, Wisdom + 10			
Wolf's Feet (Shoes): Agility + 40, Movement Speed +40%, Attack Speed +10%, 'Jump' is available			
*<Animal King> Set effect: Strength + 20, Agility + 20, Stamina +20, Defense +40			
Promised Sword(Two-handed Sword): Strength +20, Stamina +10			
Warrior's Transcripts (Shoulder Blades): Strength + 3			
Mantle with a Strange Power (Mantle): Health and Mana +20, 'Power of Resurrection' available			
Adelaine's Necklace (Necklace): Defense + 40, Affection +10, 'Blessing of the Sea' available			
Rarukan's Ring (Ring): Agility + 10, Attack Speed +10%, Critical Hit +8%,			

‘Dark Protection’ available

Ark’s Ring (Ring): Strength + 5, Agility + 5, Stamina + 5, Wisdom + 5, Intelligence + 5, ‘Sudden Increase in Power’ available

Amulet of Vitality (Bracelet): Health + 50, Health recovers by 5 every 20 seconds

Gladiator’s Honour (Bracelet): Strength, Agility, Stamina +10, Fame +500, Sword-based Skill Growth +5%

* All abilities will increase by 50% in the dark

* You have the ability to hide in the darkness (30 minutes duration. Cancelled when you get into combat)

* Resistance to Fear, Darkness, Blind, and Seduction spells is increased by 50%.

* You can bring out the true abilities from all types of tools.

* Shock absorption is increased by 20%.

* Poison resistance has increased by 50%.

* 10% increased attack and defense.

Some new information caught his eyes when looking at the information window. Although he hadn’t been able to raise his level while defending Lancel, it was satisfying just seeing the Baronet status. Having a barony in New World wasn’t a small thing. After receiving the barony and the Lordship, he had gained +5 to all stats and 5,000 fame. Since he killed some chaotic users during the battle, he had gained 5,920 fame. And the unique thing was that he could get support from a village or city. Of course, he could only use it when completing quests given by NPCs with a peerage but being able to use regular troops was something other users couldn’t imagine.

‘In addition, being a Lord allows me to meet directly with the Lord of each territory.’

In other words, he had a chance to meet the rulers of each territory and receive a quest from them. If he received quests from NPCs in such high positions then the compensation would surely be good. Maybe the biggest benefit from the Lordship was the ability to directly meet with other Lords.

‘But that is not all of the benefits.’

It was possible to receive profit after becoming the Lord. But since there was various duties and responsibilities required, sometimes it could be a nuisance. But just like Silvana, he could receive a monthly salary. It was 3% of the proceeds from the territory. The current income from the territory was 7,950 gold every 10 days. Since his salary was 3%, he would receive 238 gold and 50 silver every 10 days. That was only 1/10th of Silvana’s monthly salary but he didn’t have to worry about sieges with Lancel. In other words, it was 100% pure profit! Every month he could receive more than 700 gold by completing just a few documents. And if Lancel grew then his salary would also grow. It was a golden goose which would be coveted by any user!

‘Plus.....’

Ark opened the relevant information window and smiled.

<Relevant Investment Information Window>

Current market price for Lancel’s shares: 265 gold per every 0.1%

Currently owned shares in Lancel village (Owned/Upper Limit): 9%/25%

‘265 gold for every 0.1% and he had 9% shares!’

Ark’s eyes turned to gold as he checked the information window. Shortly after the battle the shares fell to 200 gold every 0.1%, but after the 3 guilds were attracted it soared up to 265 gold. Since he

received 5% shares for becoming the Lord, his shares had jumped for free. When converted to gold, it was a huge amount worth 13,250 gold! But this compensation was a trap. He would be stripped of his Lordship if his shares fell below 5%! In other words, he couldn't sell the 5% shares received with the Lordship. And he wouldn't be given a salary if his shares were sold. In other words, he had to choose between having a steady salary or selling his shares for a lump sum.

'But my assets are money. I don't really need money urgently at the moment so there is no reason to sell it. Well, since it is like that.....'

Just possessing the shares would bring in 700 gold every month. There was no reason to sell the shares. And he could use the Lordship if he urgently needed money. A special right of the Lord was to use his village assets as collateral for a loan. Of course, he had to pay 3% interest every 15 days and he would be deprived of the Lordship if he couldn't pay it back within 45 days. But it had considerable merit if he needed some urgent money.

'My current shares are 9% so I can safely use 4% to borrow money.'

Ark briefly closed his eyes and sank into his thoughts.

'Now it isn't an exaggeration to say that I've obtained a seat in New World. But.....'

Just a few months ago he wouldn't have been able to see this much money. Thanks to the equipment and insurance, he had received 9,450 gold from this battle. During the reconstruction plan, he had obtained 3,470 gold from the sales of the goods in his store. After Isyuram sold the stolen goods, he had also obtained 5,515 gold.

.....A total of 18,435 gold!

"But.....I don't know how much more I need but it is still insufficient. If I mortgage my 4% shares then I can borrow 10,240 gold. That is 28,675 gold. It is all I can mobilize for the moment. I'll bet all of this!"

Ark murmured in a low voice as he stared into the darkness. All that money was required for Ark's plan. The letter Ark received earlier today had moved his plan into the execution stage.

From Shambala.

I've gathered the troops you requested.

I couldn't mobilize as many of the Eastern Nation and Baran clan as you expected. After the lawless port was destroyed the Nakujuk have been invading more frequently, so we can't remove a lot of the troops. So Isabel has decided to send 800 Eastern Nation members and 500 of the Baran warriors.

Surprisingly, there are also a lot of users who follow JusticeMan, Lariette and the rehabilitation group.

It is possible to send 2,000 troops from Seutandal. JusticeMan, Lariette and the rehabilitation hyung-nims will move to Nagaran with them.

That was the letter he received from Shambala who had left for Seutandal. Yes, Ark had originally thought of two ways to defend Lancel. One of them was to attract the 3 guilds and make any users lose their will to attack. The other method was a counterattack against Jewel's group who won't give up. That's right, it was to destroy the Hermes alliance which was their main body. Of course, the reason Ark wanted to destroy the Hermes alliance wasn't just to defend Lancel village.

'Anyway, I have to take Silvana back for the sake of my ambition!'

Ark's ambition! If he held the Lordship for both Lancel and Silvana then his monthly salary would be enormous. After from the monthly salary, he could also complete the triangular trade route between Lancel, Silvana and Seutandal. The profit would reach tens of thousands of gold in one month. Ark would become a game tycoon! Ark would bet his entire fortune on that gamble.

'The Hermes alliance is under enormous pressure thanks to the destruction of the lawless port. They also lost 500 people while trying to attack Lancel village this time. Including Jewel and Duke, more than half of them were trapped in jail. 'Then now is the time to strike the Hermes alliance!'

Ark came to that conclusion shortly after the end of the Lancel war. Now was the chance when the opponent was weakened! But even if they were weakened, the Hermes alliance was still one of the 5 powers in Nagaran. According to the secret agent Sid who had been planted, the current Hermes alliance still had 5,000 people! Even if they received a huge damage to their funds, they could still hire mercenaries for sieges. This meant the opponents were more than 5,000 people. On the other hand, Ark could only mobilize 300 troops from Lancel.

‘It is imperative to gain more troops!’

While Bread and Sid had been sent to persuade the 3 guilds, Shambala and Redian to Seutandal and Bristania to gather troops. Shambala had managed to collect 2,000 people from Seutandal and the Eastern Nation while Redian had 1,000 applicants from Bristania. They were able to collect these users thanks to the influence of the TV broadcast. The fame of Shambala and Redian were no comparison to before.

‘So I presently have 3,300 troops. Yet that is still weaker than the Hermes alliance. I should collect some more troops from Giran and Selebrid. If I appear as Dark Wolf and say this battle will be broadcasted then I should gather 1,000 people with no trouble.’

Ark was convinced that he could gather more troops after the Lancel defensive war. But no matter how many troops he could gather, it wouldn’t be enough. If he used Dark Wolf’s fame and the TV broadcast then he could definitely lure in users. But while the Lancel defensive war had a cause, this battle was more Ark’s private matters. Since Jewel’s face had been shown, Ark could associate him with Hermes but in the end the person occupying Silvana would be Ark. There weren’t many users who would want to enter a war like that for free. Even if he could gather some, they would just be low levelled. But high level users needed compensation to risk dropping equipment or the death penalty.

‘The counterattack for Lancel village was a surprise which is how I was able to succeed with low level users. But the siege was different from the Lancel defensive war. The users who enter the siege should have adequate levels and combat skills.’

That was why Ark needed money. In order to gain enough troops to match Hermes, he needed to use money.

'I currently have 28,675 gold so 4,000 people will be my limit. If I don't succeed in making Silvana fall with 4,000 people there I have no more chances!'

However, he now had no choice. If he missed the chance while the Hermes alliance was weakened then the chance to retake Silvana would disappear. Ark's dream of a triangular trade route and a game tycoon would vanish. He couldn't miss this opportunity so Ark decided to gamble it all on this siege. If the gamble won then it would be a jackpot and if it didn't.....

'It will be the end. I absolutely can't let that happen!'

Ark stood up and looked out the window. It was window overlooking the north where Giran and Silvana lay. The place Ark would soon go to was there. It was the stage of the decisive battle with the Hermes alliance.

TO BE CONTINUED